



ISSUE 208 HOLIDAY 2017

WWW.GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM

XBOX

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

ONE X

4K GAMING GOLD

- FORZA, CUPHEAD, PUBG, SEA OF THIEVES, & MORE
- UPGRADE THE GAMES YOU ALREADY OWN

REVIEW BLOWOUT!

FORZA MOTORSPORT 7
MADDEN 18 FIFA 18
SHADOW OF WAR

FAR CRY 5

HANDS-ON WITH
THE MOST AMBITIOUS
FAR CRY EVER



Future

SIMS 4



RED DEAD 2



EXTINCTION



OKAMI HD



PUBG



The Extraterrestrial

Designed by

Rebecca

Rebecca Menchaca

Buy this design or create your own at
xboxdesignlaboriginals.com/ET







What's in the box?



Stephen Ashby
Editor

It was Steve's birthday this month! He turned down the kind offer of birthday bumps from the team, but did accept the delicious chocolate cake they kindly bought him. What a lovely bunch.

New consoles don't come along very often, so when one as powerful as the Xbox One X is about to launch, it's fair to say we get a bit excited. This month, that meant going a bit overboard and putting together an issue so packed with cool content and free stuff that we almost didn't get it all into the pages you're now flicking through. If your Xbox One X launch guide (p46)—packed with tips, tricks and hardware suggestions—wasn't enough, we've also been talking to Xbox devs about the games you already own that will look better on the new console (p54), gone hands-on with *Far Cry 5* (p38), and packed so many huge game reviews in that the rest of the mag started getting jealous. Read our verdicts on *Forza Motorsport 7*, *FIFA 18*, and more starting on p62. Oh, and enjoy your free download of our Halo eBook, too (see below)!

THE OXM TEAM



Daniella Lucas
Deputy editor

Dani took a week off this month to chill out and play some videogames. Which, surprisingly, is not what we do all day at OXM Towers (we wish!).



Warren Brown
Senior art editor

Warren organized the photography of the Xbox One X model that was delivered to us this month—that's his excellent handiwork on this issue's cover.



Russell Lewin
Production editor

Despite our requests, Russell continuously 'forgets' to join the OXM Slack channel. Instead, he insists on speaking to us. *Out loud*. What a monster [shudder].



Problems downloading?
Email oxm@futurenet.com

ISSUE 208 HOLIDAY 2017

EDITORIAL

Editor Stephen Ashby sashby@futurenet.com
Senior Art Editor Warren Brown wobrown@futurenet.com
Deputy Editor Daniella Lucas celshadeddreams@futurenet.com
Production Editor Russell Lewin floatedrellic264@futurenet.com
Our Man Down Under Paul Taylor ptaylor@futurenet.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Writing Luke Albright, Kimberley Ballard, Ian Dransfield, Matthew Elliott, Steve Hogarty, Leon Hurley, Phil Iwanik, Martin Kitts, David Meikleham, Dom Peppiatt, Dom Reseigh-Lincoln, Samuel Roberts, Richard Stanton, Justin Towell, Josh West, Ben Wilson
Art Marcus Faint, Cliff Newman, Rebecca Shaw
Production Ross Hamilton, Philip Morris, Drew Sleep

All copyrights and trademarks are recognised and respected

BUSINESS

Vice President, Sales
Stacy Gaines, stacy.gaines@futurenet.com
Vice President, Strategic Partnerships
Isaac Ugay, isaac.ugay@futurenet.com
East Coast Account Director
Brandle Rushing, brandle.rushing@futurenet.com
East Coast Account Director
Michael Plump, michael.plump@futurenet.com
Midwest Account Director
Jessica Reinert, jessica.reinert@futurenet.com
West Coast Account Director
Austin Park, austin.park@futurenet.com
West Coast Account Director
Brandon Wong, brandon.wong@futurenet.com
West Coast Account Manager
Tad Perez, tad.perez@futurenet.com
Director of Marketing Robbie Monticola
Director, Client Services Tracy Lam
Director, Retail Sales Bill Shevley

PRODUCTION

Head of Production US & UK Mark Constance
Production Project Manager Diane Scott
Advertising Production Manager Joanne Crosby
Digital Editions Controller Jason Hudson
Production Manager Nola Cokely

SUBSCRIPTION QUERIES

Visit us on the web at www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/gaming/official-xbox-magazine-subscription, email us at contact@myfavouritemagazines.co.uk, call us toll free at 1-844-779-2822, or write to us at Official Xbox Magazine Customer Care, P.O. Box 2024, Langhorne, PA 19047.

BACK ISSUES

To order back issues, please call us at 1-844-779-2822, or visit us on the web at www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/gaming/xbox-the-official-magazine-back-issues/

REPRINTS Please contact us at Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080

Phone (650) 872-1642
Fax (650) 872-2207
Website www.futureus.com
ISSN 1534-7850

© 2017 Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Microsoft, Xbox, and the Xbox logo are trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or in other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. All other trademarks and copyrights are the property of their respective holders.

Global Chief Revenue Officer Charlie Speight
Vice President, Marketing & Operations Rhoda Bueno
Vice President, Product Development Bart Jaworski
Finance Director Frederick Allread

Senior HR Generalist Mary Mauck
Future US, Inc. is part of Future plc. Future produces carefully targeted special-interest magazines, websites, and events for people who share a passion. We aim to satisfy that passion by creating titles offering value for money, reliable information, and smart buying advice, and that are a pleasure to read or visit. Today we publish more than 150 magazines, 65 websites, and a growing number of events in the US, UK, France, and Italy. Over 100 international editions of our magazines are also published in 30 other countries across the world.

Future Future is an award-winning international media group and leading digital business. We reach more than 57 million international consumers a month and create world-class content and advertising solutions for passionate consumers online, on tablet & smartphone and in print.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTP).
www.futureplc.com
Chief executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
Chief financial officer Penny Ladin-Brand
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE (ISSN 1534-7850) is published 13 times a year (monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue), by Future US, Inc., One Lombard Street, Suite 200, San Francisco, CA 94111. Phone: (650) 872-1642; Fax: (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com. Periodicals postage paid in San Bruno, CA and at additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail. Canadian orders must be prepaid. Canadian price includes postage and GST #R128220888. PMA #40612698. Subscriptions do not include newsstand specials. **POSTMASTER:** Send changes of address to Official Xbox Magazine, PO Box 2024, Langhorne, PA 19047, USA. Standard Mail enclosed in the following edition: None. Ride-Along enclosed in the following editions: None. Canadian returns: IMEX Global Solutions, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US, Inc. also publishes @Gamer, Crochet Today!, MacLife, Maximum PC, and PC Gamer. Entire contents copyright © 2017, Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. Future US, Inc. is not affiliated with the companies or products covered in Official Xbox Magazine. Reproduction on the Internet of the articles and pictures in this magazine is illegal without the prior written consent of Official Xbox Magazine. Products named in the pages of Official Xbox Magazine are trademarks of their respective companies. PRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

XBOX ONE & WINDOWS 10 EXCLUSIVE

Sea of Thieves

Coming Early 2018



Microsoft
Studios

© 2017 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.



Crude Humor
Use of Alcohol
Violence



XBOX ONE



Windows 10

START

contents



Everything you can look forward to over the next 100 or so pages

insider

- 010 THE BIG NEWS
STORY: XBOX
ONE X
- 012 OKAMI HD
- 014 THE BIG PICTURE:
THE ADVENTURE
PALS
- 016 TOMB RAIDER
- 018 OXM OPINIONS

previews

- 022 PLAYER
UNKNOWN'S
BATTLEGROUNDS
- 026 THE SIMS 4
- 028 CODE VEIN
- 030 EXTINCTION
- 032 RED DEAD
REDEMPTION 2
- 034 SEA OF THIEVES



SUBSCRIBE
NOW ON
PAGE 078



010



032





features

- 038 THE BIG FEATURE:
FAR CRY 5
- 046 XBOX ONE X
LAUNCH GUIDE
- 054 OXM INVESTIGATES:
4K ENHANCED
GAMES

reviews

- 062 FIFA 18
- 066 FORZA 7
- 068 MIDDLE-EARTH:
SHADOW OF WAR
- 070 DISHONORED:
DEATH OF THE
OUTSIDER
- 072 MARVEL VS
CAPCOM: INFINITE
- 074 CUPHEAD
- 076 MADDEN NFL 18

extra

- 082 NOW PLAYING:
GRAND THEFT
AUTO ONLINE
- 084 F1 2017
- 085 STAR WARS
BATTLEFRONT
- 086 RETROSPECTIVE:
RESIDENT EVIL 4
- 090 WHY I HATE... THE
BOSSSES IN METAL
GEAR SOLID V
- 092 10 SCARIEST
ENEMIES ON XBOX
- 096 DIRECTORIES
- 098 DISC SLOT: BARRY
FEATHER



038



092



074



082



→ HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY? WHY NOT WRITE TO TEAM OXM AT [OXM@FUTURENET.COM](mailto:oxm@futurenet.com)

insider



In case you somehow didn't know, a little thing called the **Xbox One X** (p10) is finally upon us. We've seen it, sniffed it, and caressed its ports while the PR handler wasn't looking, so we've been celebrating its release into the wild in November with a few last bits of info. Elsewhere, we're glad to see the return of a true gaming classic with **Okami HD** (p12) coming to Xbox One. It's been 11 years since its original release, and thanks to its painted aesthetic it's still considered one of the most beautiful games ever—be sure to give it a look. This month's 'indie game you should be taking notice of' award goes to **The Adventure Pals** (p14) thanks to its goofy-looking giraffe and weird obsession with hot dogs. It's the exact kind of light-hearted and quirky that we want all in one lovely, bright package. Finally, Lara Croft makes her return, but not in game form. Instead, we've got a sneak peek at her silver screen latest in the new **Tomb Raider** (p16) movie, which looks set to be full of some epic action sequences that might even put the games to shame.



010



012



014



016

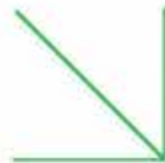






Xbox One X is here

After much teasing, **Microsoft's** 4K-ready, HDR-loving super upgrade is almost here, and it's going to change how you play... forever



It's been a whole five months since Microsoft finally pulled the tarpaulin off its mystery new Xbox One upgrade, ditched that Project Scorpio nomenclature (well, kind of), and showed off a console that supports the next step in modern gaming. Xbox One X is almost here, and it's like getting your biggest Christmas present a whole six weeks early.

Pre-orders went live back in September, and while the initial waves sold out across most retailers, more units have since been rolling in as we've ticked down to the big release day. And while those initial sell outs weren't so great for gamers hoping to add Microsoft's newest console to their collection, the news flies in the face of initial predictions that its high \$499/£449 price point would put a damper on its launch figures. Looks like Xbox One X is going to be a hit—and about time, too.

We've already had our hands on a model here at **OXM** Towers and, as you can see from the shots opposite, it's slim, sleek, and attractive in all the right places. That smaller size was a big talking point when the box was unveiled at E3, but in person it's impossible to miss just how much Microsoft has streamlined the Xbox One X is compared to the original model. Much like Xbox One S it's going to save a lot of space by your TV. Oh, and that space grey color? Mwah.

Games for miles

And you're not going to be short of games to play on your shiny new beast of a console, either. More than 130 titles have been confirmed by Microsoft so far (that's significantly more than any other upgraded console out there), including plenty of the big releases coming your way this holiday season. The remaster of *LA Noire* will be getting the 4K treatment, as will Ubisoft Montreal's cult-bashing madness in *Far Cry 5*. *Okami HD* (turn the page for more information on that returning Capcom classic) also gets a new lick of HDR paint alongside new Spiders IP, *Greedfall*.

If you haven't got a 4K TV to hand, Microsoft is planning to have you covered there, too. Head of Xbox marketing, Aaron Greenberg, has confirmed that Xbox One X will support supersampling (the process where a higher resolution image is downsampled to shine on more commonly found 1080p screens), and that we'll see it in action before launch. Interestingly, it'll be up to developers to include the feature in their respective titles, but considering Microsoft won't want to exclude the significant number of potential owners who haven't invested in the 4K dream yet, we're hopeful supersampling will be rolled out across the board. ■

Mouse hunt

Not only will you be able to use your Xbox One controller with Xbox One X, but you'll even be able to plug in your keyboard and mouse. The feature won't be arriving at launch, but Microsoft has confirmed it will be coming 'soon'. Not every game will support the use of these PC peripherals, and Microsoft will leave it down the discretion of each developer to decide if it wants to support it.



WOLF WHISTLE

Okami leaps onto Xbox

The once exclusive **Capcom classic** gets to shine its light to a brand new audience



Following more than a decade of exclusivity elsewhere, the watercolor wonder that is *Ōkami HD* will

finally be setting paw on Xbox shores just in time for the holiday season—and it's bringing 4K resolution support, the option to play in the aspect ratio of the original game, and those brilliant interactive loading screens along for the ride as well.

'Oh come on, not *another* HD remaster,' we hear you cry. 'Don't we have enough already?' Yes, we've got loads (and there'll be plenty more before Xbox One's time is done), but there's nothing on Xbox quite like *Ōkami*. The word 'classic' gets thrown about a lot these days, but this is one of those few games that actually deserves it. Created by the now defunct Clover Studio, *Ōkami* melds platforming, exploration, puzzle solving, and, of course, deity-based paint skills.

Placing you in the wolfish skin of Amaterasu—a sun goddess from Japanese folklore—it's your job to banish the darkness and restore the world to its rightful, light-filled state. Sounds like the kind of virtual adventure you've embarked on a hundred times, right? Spend five minutes in the colorful world of this

lupine lady, and you'll see why it's so special. The game is designed to resemble classical, ink-washed Japanese paintings, with Amaterasu's Celestial Brush power enabling you to build bridges, kill foes, and conjure elemental effects. It's got a real *The Legend Of Zelda* quality about it, so

"It's got a real The Legend Of Zelda quality about it, so it doesn't feel tired or dated"

it's managed to weather the years without feeling tired or dated. Not bad for a decade old curio.

Lone wolf

The videogame industry isn't short of titles influenced by Japanese culture and history, but very few are so deeply informed by the allegorical tales of its folklore. *Ōkami* goes deep with its charming and unique journey into the world of Nippon and spiritual stories of Shinto (the ethnic religion of Japan). You'll encounter artists, musicians, warriors, and demons as you discover

Brush up

That Celestial Brush is your most powerful tool while you're liberating the enshrouded world of Nippon. You can use it in combat to slash your enemies to ribbons, restore buildings to open up new areas on the map, and even solve elaborate puzzles. Its beautiful art style is just one of many elements that has made *Ōkami* such a beloved game, so being to make that world even more pretty yourself makes it all the more inviting.

ABOVE RIGHT It's still one of the most stylish games ever made.

RIGHT Being able to use your Celestial Brush to kick ass never gets old.



engrossing side-quests, unlock new moves from forming constellations, and collect those elusive Red Fangs. Even the interactive loading screens are brilliant, enabling you to unlock in-game items while you're waiting for a new section to boot up.

It's one of those games where we could fill this whole issue discussing its every nuance, but that would just ruin the fun of playing *Ōkami* for the first time. It's also great to know Capcom has chosen to pack in the original 2007 release's 4:3 ratio as well as a more modern widescreen presentation. Add that to a shiny new support for 4K, and *Ōkami HD*'s cell-shaded extravaganza will be a true treat on Microsoft's family of consoles.

Get *Okami HD* on December 12 for \$19.99.



EXCITED? HORRIFIED? LET THE WORLD KNOW AT WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/OXMUK



PLAY/EJECT

THE THINGS PUSHING OUR BUTTON (OR NOT)



Assassins on tour

Assassin's Creed Origins will feature a Discover Tour mode, allowing you to explore ancient Egypt and learn about its history. It will land as free DLC in early 2018.



Battle royale

Game Preview title *Fortnite* added a Battle Royale mode that bears a striking resemblance to that of *PUBG*, but also features crafting.



Surviving Skyrim

Bethesda has added a Survival Mode to *Skyrim*. You'll need to eat and stay warm if you want to live to fight dragons!



Watch out

Images online suggest Microsoft was working on an Xbox-branded smartwatch with health tracking, but it was scrapped. Boo!



Saints No

Volition, the dev behind the *Saints Row* series, laid off around 30 staff after the launch of *Agents Of Mayhem*.



Deary me

Dear Esther dev The Chinese Room is 'going dark' for a few months, after financial and health complications made work untenable.



Friends forever

Crazy mishaps await in the wonderfully weird The Adventure Pals

We love discovering promising indie games here at OXM, and we love them even more when they're utterly bonkers, like this platformer from Armor Games about a boy with a pet rock and a giraffe in his backpack. This odd ensemble is off on a quest to save the boy's papa from being turned into a hotdog, and things only get stranger from there.

It reminds us of the similarly named *Adventure Time* cartoon with its bright aesthetic, magic world, and strange cast of characters, including an

insecure whale, a hungry mailman, some toast, and a fancy burrito. You'll be able to share in the madness with a friend with a co-op mode, as well as try out an array of weird weaponry, and take on a breakfast-shaped boss battle. We have no idea what's going on, but we can't wait to get stuck in. ■

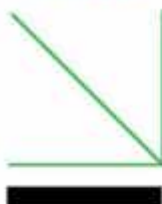
The Adventure Pals will be coming to Xbox One in early 2018.





Izsek Kitchoff

VEST OF THE VEST



BELOW Here's one they made earlier.



Rising star

A closer look at the new *Tomb Raider* movie

After seeing a few sneaky photos earlier in the year, we've now finally got a proper look at the new rebooted *Tomb Raider* movie, and it looks like it's set to be far closer to the games than the previous Croft films from 2001 and 2003. It follows the story of the 2013 *Tomb Raider* game fairly faithfully, following Lara as she finds her way to Yamatai Island to uncover its secrets and getting put through hell in the process.

The film stars Alicia Vikander as a very convincing, modern Lara Croft who gets put through her paces in some particularly dicey-looking action sequences, including dodging some spinning blades in an ancient tomb and leaping across a ravine with her trusty ice pick. After her father's disappearance (played by *The Wire*'s Dominic West), she picks up where his work left off—uncovering secret plots that put the world in danger and solving puzzle boxes that lead to mystical quests.

Upgrade path

Alicia has done a lot of the stunt work herself, and has gone through some seriously tough physical training to mirror the rebooted Lara's grit and self-sufficiency. She's nothing like the 2001 version, and has the kind of

muscle you'd expect from someone surviving on a remote island full of raging rivers to fall into and bad guys to take down. It goes to show that Warner Bros is taking the character seriously, as they're not dumbing her down for a film audience.

It looks like some of the story beats from the game have been cut, but that makes a lot of sense when you're trying to squash a 10-hour gaming experience into a movie. The eternal question of whether this will finally be a great videogame movie persists though. There's was a lot of hope for Michael Fassbender's recent *Assassin's Creed* movie, but that failed to capture the excitement of its source material, so here's hoping that *Tomb Raider* has what it takes to compare to its gaming inspiration. Everything shown so far seems to point to this being a success. ■



BARREL WATCH

GAMING'S FAVORITE PROP RATED BY OUR RESIDENT COOPER



Wolfenstein II

What you see here is the final moments of a barrel's life before it

explodes in a brilliant rain of fire, destroying its enemies in the process. It has fulfilled its destiny.



Extinction

There's nothing quite like taking a stroll through a traditional

fantasy setting for some excellent barrel spotting. These curved classics are beauts.



Code Vein

When the world is dark and full of bloodthirsty vagrants in an

apocalyptic world, the humble cask will be there to keep you warm in your darkest hour.



God's Trigger

A wooden drum is a great way to make your abode feel

more homely and makes for a lovely, quirky end table. It'll also match your blood-splattered rug.



Monster Hunter: World

Barrels as plant holders? Whatever will

they think of next! Truly, our wondrous wooden compatriots are versatile beasts.

We've upgraded

NEW
SITE LIVE
NOW



- ✓ Designed to suit every screen
- ✓ Complete round-the-clock news
- ✓ The best PC reviews and features
- ✓ In-depth hardware coverage

PC GAMER.COM THE GLOBAL AUTHORITY ON PC GAMES

Steve Hogarty is... The Fixer

Steve tries to fix **multiplayer games** by going offline

There was a time before the internet. Nobody can be sure of the exact dates, but I think it was the 1970s or 1980s. Everybody was doing a new kind of dance called the 'Squirty Berty', which resembled using a broomstick to sweep cobwebs from a hard-to-reach corner of the ceiling, but in fact had deeply perverted sexual connotations. When all forms of dance were eventually outlawed by the end of whichever decade this was, Kevin Bacon, an upbeat Chicago teen who defied authority, reminded us all of the power of rock music in a series of climactic musical scenes (these events would later inspire the film *Tremors*).

Shortly after that, the Spice Girls invented the first modem, and we could finally start looking at all those websites that had just been sitting around on the internet, waiting for us to 'log on' and see them. Back then, the information superhighway was mostly flashing 'WEB-SITE UNDER CONSTRUCTION' banners, but since the internet was finally completed in 2005, we can play games together on it. And that's frankly terrible. A mistake from which we can never truly recover.

The problem

As the Pope once said, "Hell is other people, and I should know because I'm the Pope. I own a special telescope that can see into hell".

There are 99 problems with multiplayer games, and I'd say that 98 of them can be fixed. Imbalanced killstreak rewards, lengthy respawn times, camping, that thing where you accidentally drop your pistol down a laundry chute; I could fix those problems in my sleep. But one unchanging aspect of online play is *other players*. And call me a cynic, but other players suck.

Humans are inherently selfish, and seek only their own personal gratification.



"We can replace other players with simulated players who praise you"

As such, every multiplayer game must either be in service of our basest, lizard-brain desires—killing one another with frag grenades or getting somebody to step on a landmine that you've put outside their house—or must try to trick players into co-operating with one another, usually by designing the healing tool in the style of yet another really cool



gun. Even *Overwatch*, for all its clever multiplayer design, has healers throwing grenades that regenerate health.

We are obsessed with violence, and cannot be compelled to work together unless our most primal cranks are being yanked. And so, with few exceptions, multiplayer games are headed down a design cul-de-sac, and in some cases they're dragging single-player campaigns along with them. All because of everybody I meet online who isn't me.

The solution

The most fun I've ever had playing an online shooter was in the first few hours of *Titanfall*, before I realized that I hadn't actually been fighting other human players, but the easy-to-kill AI enemies that populate the map to make you feel like you're winning. That's when I realized two things. Firstly, I am fundamentally bad at games, and probably not qualified to have this column. And secondly, the reason multiplayer games are maligned by half the people who play them is because it's necessary for one person to feel defeated in order for another to feel victorious. And experiencing any kind of setback, however minor, is incompatible with my millennial sensibilities.

If we can't change the human condition to make playing with other people not a horrific experience, why not get rid of other players entirely? We can replace them with simulated players who praise your technique, offer gentle encouragement, and always let you do the most important jobs.

The result would be an experience just as fulfilling as playing against real humans, albeit with 80% fewer slurs against your mother, and more scope for cooperative new game modes thanks to your unerringly compliant robot friends. ■

Steve can be found as [@misterbrilliant](#) on a cool website called [twitter dot com](#).

Daniella Lucas is...

The Traveler

Dani takes a short city break in **The Witcher 3's Novigrad**

Sometimes when things get a bit much all I want in the world is to run away somewhere and get lost for a while. Unfortunately, that's really not a very good idea in real life, what with all of the responsibilities and these pages not being able to write themselves. The only answer is a short weekend getaway, and since I can't fund constant trips to lovely foreign cities, it's up to games to save the day. Step in *The Witcher 3* with its brooding hero and wind-blasted scenery, and while gallivanting around the countryside is also fun, I'm here to take in some culture, and get lost in what makes the locations in this game feel so real. So it's time to jump on your horse and ride off to Novigrad for a proper city break experience.

It's such an impressively characterful city that I often find myself wandering around its crowded streets for hours taking in the scenery, completely ignoring any *Witcher* business that I'm probably supposed to be doing. Walking these streets as Geralt is the closest you can get to visiting an old European city without having to leave the butt groove on your sofa. It's wonderful to be able to get so lost in a place that you feel like at one point, somewhere, it actually existed.

The docks is where Novigrad is at its most natural, with hundreds of NPCs going about their day. It's also fantastically dirty in a way that gives you a real sense of what living in the city is like. Muddy puddles line the streets, while drunks puke into the bay after too many ales. Courtesans display their 'wares' on street corners, and gruff men work up a sweat unloading ships.

Whirlwind tour

Further into the city, you'll start to find more recreational pursuits, particularly around Hierarch Square. The narrow streets and red-roofed buildings open out



"Drunks puke in the bay and courtesans display their 'wares'"

into a large space decorated by banners and filled with stalls. Bards put on shows, while a crier might try to convince you to go to a local event. There are market stalls with tempting meats and fruit hanging from their awnings, and larger



shops are nestled around the edges. Of course, you'll have to get used to the smell of burning flesh—as it's also the site of witch burnings—but that's a small price to pay for visiting such a beautiful city.

While you're out exploring, you might bump into Witch Hunters patrolling the streets that add an unsettling presence to an area when you see them. It's part of what makes Novigrad feel so realistic; it's not all pretty ancient buildings and impressive bridges, there are plenty of dark corners to explore too.

Class divide

The city is actually made up of two islands, with a large, covered crossway called St Gregory's Bridge linking the two together. The bridge marks the point where the classes divide—nobles and rich townfolk live on Temple Isle, and so the architecture shifts. The houses are grander, the streets cleaner, and gardens are dotted around for people to enjoy. It's a stark contrast to across the water.

Winding up the hill, you finally reach Elector's square and the Temple of Eternal Fire, the highest point in the whole city and the largest temple in the entire kingdom. It's an impressive sight, like a giant beacon that can be seen from miles away. While you can walk inside to marvel at the flame within, you can't climb its tower. It's the one disappointment in what is an incredible construction.

Everything about the city and how it winds its way up to its highest point is worth taking the time to appreciate. It draws you in, and soon you realize you'll have spent six hours just roaming the streets just to see what's around the next corner. It's the best made city in any game I've played, and it's well worth a visit just so you've got something to compare every other videogame location to. ■

You can see more of Dani's gaming travels on Instagram: [@daniellamlucas](https://www.instagram.com/daniellamlucas).



Preview



The games we want the most



OXM'S MOST WANTED

Steve's pick

Red Dead Redemption 2
I played *RDR* to death on 360, and this is looking like a real rootin' tootin' time. Now what about a release date, eh?

Dani's pick

Sea Of Thieves
I finally got to play this and now I can't wait to dive back into that ocean and eat bananas with the skin still on.

Russell's pick

The Sims 4
I have great difficulty in running my own life but I'm hoping that organising other people's will be much more successful.

Waiting is never easy, but it's even harder when it's the biggest and most popular new shooter ever, and it's been 'coming soon' to Xbox for what feels like an eternity. We've been enviously watching PC players of **PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds** (p22) for a while now, but our wait really is almost over, this time with pad controls sorted, and keyboard and mouse support for the Xbox One on its way. It's so close that we've been practising our foraging skills by searching for dirty clothes in abandoned warehouses. That's totally safe, right? Speaking of questionable lifestyle choices, **The Sims 4** (p26) is also almost here on Xbox to satisfy all of your bullying and 'woohoo' needs. There's nothing quite like building a depressing hovel for your Sims to help with stress relief. If having all-consuming power over the lives of others doesn't do it for you, then maybe a look at some giant troll-slaying will. Say hello to **Extinction** (p30), which will have you zipping up giant beats and chopping their limbs off. Lovely. Finally, we have a massive info splurge on our most anticipated game of 2018: **Red Dead Redemption 2** (p32), and it's looking every bit like the masterpiece we're waiting for. We can't wait to play as cowboys roaming the vast wilderness of America while threatening murder to extort money... What? Don't judge our hobbies.



022



026



030



032

021

→ READ THE LATEST PREVIEWS OF THE BIGGEST GAMES AT GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM



PUBG's first esports tournament at Gamescom 2017 had a \$350,000 prize pool

PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds

1.3 million players every day?
Someone needs a new nickname

Phil Iwaniuk

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT STUDIOS DEVELOPER BLUEHOLE
FORMAT XBOX ONE, XBOX ONE X ETA WINTER

Very rarely do we get to dip quite so far into the great jar of games journo hyperbole as when we look ahead to the imminent release of *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*, so please permit us these few wildly enthusiastic statements: We're about to host a genuine gaming phenomenon on our trusty boxes of X, and there's every chance it can find *Minecraft* levels of popularity here.

Not from the same crowd, you understand. Bluehole's 100-player battle royale is considerably less wholesome than the aforementioned sandbox and cow-slapping sim. Set in a deserted Eastern European island after some ghastly unspecified event has caused all civilians to flee and forced you and 99 adversaries to fight to the death, *PUBG* (as it's known to its pals) starts at gritty, and takes a nosedive into even darker territory from there. If we were sitting at the fireside with a glass of fine brandy in our hand, we'd even ponder the masterful quality *PUBG* has at making us, the players, tell the story of its world with our actions. After all, there's nothing stopping individuals, or even pairs and four-person squads, from forming larger alliances until the final stages of a round. But of course no one does. It's simply not the done thing in the game. Truly, you hold a mirror up to this age of individualism, PlayerUnknown.

Cherry-picking

Let's be real though: The game's stratospheric popularity comes as a result of its ability to corral the

best bits of multiplayer and survival games for the last few years, not any undercover social commentary. Remember when *DayZ* was a cool name to drop in 'coming to Xbox soon' conversations? *PUBG* takes the huge world map, the desolate atmosphere, and the military-grade realism from Bohemia's stalled venture and chucks it all into a match type that forces excitement on you. How about *GTA Online*'s roaming gangs, and improvised combat encounters? Present and correct here. Smartly, by shrugging off the persistent world stuff that bogs so many similar games down into a tedious, grindy experience, *PUBG* guarantees regular moments of controller-dropping, heart-squeezing drama. You might not have seen another living soul since you dropped out of the plane

"PUBG guarantees regular moments of heart-squeezing drama"

at the beginning of the match with 99 others, but when you notice the counter at the top-left reads '20 left', it's impossible not to feel tense.

To drill deeper into how exactly *PUBG* achieves that tension and to survive its *Hunger Games* mechanics, one must know the rules. After the initial skydive which commences each round, somewhere in the 8x8km map a play area will reveal itself. That in itself poses some interesting questions for you while you sit, terrified, with a parachute on your back. Do you head for the areas that you know the good loot usually spawns at, like the military base to the south, or the power plant? Or do you instead head somewhere central, knowing that you'll probably land within the first play area, but

MAIN No matter what—the tie!



024



ABOVE At this range, gunfights last about 0.03 seconds. The resulting heart spasms go on a bit longer.

LEFT It all looks so peaceful now...



2000 Japanese movie *Battle Royale* is a major inspiration, to no one's surprise

"Losing the ability to sneak a look round walls makes for a different match"

LOVE HANDLES

As punishingly dull as it sounds, doors are an absolutely central gameplay mechanic. Every building has each of its doors shut at the beginning of a round, so seeing an open one is a good indication that a place has already been looted. However, seeing a closed door is no guarantee of safety: Perhaps someone's waiting inside, having looted the place, their beads trained at head-height on the front door. Crossing any threshold is consequently horrible on the old nerves.

→ with fewer looting opportunities? And that's without factoring in the trajectory of the plane, and the fact that most players tend to drop very close to its path. Any of these factors can and will lead to you having to fight off attackers with a frying pan wearing only some underwear within seconds of landing. We did say it got dark.

The play area diminishes in size every few minutes, and all those caught outside it will take damage until they make their way inside. In this manner, the relative safety you feel in the early stages is gradually tugged away and replaced by more frequent gunfire sounding out from all around you, 4X4s and motorbikes roaring past, and the unshakeable feeling of being one second away from an unsighted headshot (and an ignominious end to the round). However, brave players might want to explore outside the playzone for loot if they're packing enough med kits and bandages to survive that slow and steady damage. Basically, there are wrinkles of complexity everywhere you look.

Chicken dinner

Over on PC, *PUBG* has evolved steadily since its Early Access debut at the start of the year. The foundations were firm from the start, but recent updates to add new guns, weather conditions, and match types give an indication of the finished product we'll see on Xbox One and the One X later this year. Recently, Bluehole rolled out first-person-only match types which restrict the perspective to... well, you get it. It might not sound like a game-changer, but losing the peripheral vision granted by third-person cam, and the ability to sneak a look around walls that it grants, makes for a different match. Since cross-platform play between PC and Xbox One will almost certainly be a thing, first-person mode may act as a bit of a leveller between mouse-and-keyboard players and those with pads.

To that end, PlayerUnknown himself Brendan Greene recently voiced his

admiration of *Destiny*'s auto-aim mechanic, and the possibility that we might see something similar in *PUBG*'s Xbox release to further smooth out cross-platform play. Since a lot of the gunfighting tends to happen either at extreme long range through a 4x scope, or extreme close range as two players find themselves in the same dilapidated cabin, aim precision demands are high. Some form of auto-aim sounds like a good idea.

Greene's magpie eye falls on *Sea of Thieves*' water tech, too. A number of studios within the Microsoft fold are helping Bluehole out on the Xbox release. Rare included, and discussions have been held between the two studios about sharing the tech which creates *SoT*'s lovely rippling waters. Currently in the PC version, water only appears as the surrounding ocean or in medium-sized puddle form in a specific marshland area of the game's only map, but there are plans for several other environments for the full release. So far we know about a dense urban landscape filled with highrise buildings and surrounded by arid desert—not much potential for H₂O there, so it sounds like plans may also be afoot for either a new map featuring some lakes, or perhaps more water-based vehicles for the final game.

Said final game will also bring several weather conditions, such as the most recent foggy update, thunderstorms, and sunset states. It's a real pea-souper too, that fog. More than just adding a creepy Stephen King atmosphere, it brings visibility way down, meaning audio cues are more important than ever. When the weather gets this way, the temptation to sneak-kill people increases sharply.

About that *DayZ* comparison earlier, by the way: Don't worry, this one is actually going to happen. It's already the seventh best-selling game of all time on PC, and is carrying so much momentum into this Xbox release that you can freely toss aside the negative connotations of Early Access. Microsoft is serious about making Xbox the home for *PUBG* on console—evident in the network of first-party studios helping out on the project—and we're serious about making *PUBG* our home for the foreseeable future when it arrives. ■

BELOW There may be even more lakes in the final game.

There have been 66 expansions for *Sims* titles since the first game. Which, y'know—is a lot

The Sims 4

"I sure am enjoying this swim—wait, where'd the pool ladder go?"

Phil Iwanluk

PUBLISHER EA DEVELOPER MAXIS, THE SIMS STUDIO
FORMAT XBOX ONE ETA NOVEMBER 17

You might have heard of this one. EA's doll house cash cow has sold roughly ten copies for every human being on Earth at this point, and spawns expansion packs like *Gremlins* spawn, um, other *Gremlins*. The only jewel missing from *The Sims 4*'s crown, in fact, has been an Xbox release.

As the more eagle-eyed among you may have deduced, that's all about to change. This November, *The Sims 4* releases with the benefit of three years worth of niggles patched out, and some extra content. And we don't mean extra content in the traditional 'more missions and an offensive multiplayer customization item' sense. This being *The Sims*, the goodies on offer are additional decor options, some hot tubs, and fresh outdoorsy fashion choices, together comprising the Perfect Patio Stuff pack.

EA's last *Sims* release for consoles was *The Sims 3 Pets* way back in 2011 when the world seemed kinder and Twitter still felt kind of exciting. As you'd assume, the essential formula remains the same, but there have been substantial changes and additions with the advent of a new base game.

Perhaps the most immediately obvious is in how Sims emote. No longer content with just 'sad because

voided bowels in public' and 'miming tennis serve in spirited conversation with neighbor', Maxis has expanded the range of interactions, and the moods which modify those interactions, in order to create a more human, relatable collection of polygons. For example, if a Sim becomes embarrassed after being rejected by their crush at their own birthday party while literally every family member and friend in their life watches on, they'll become understandably reticent to play the violin for everyone immediately after. On the flipside of that particularly dark example, playing chess for a while can make a Sim focused, which will in turn spawn moodlets (things your Sim wants to do, in layman's terms) based on that state. They might want to practise a skill, and be able to do it for longer without, say, a weak bladder intruding on the activity.

Pulled together

Creating a Sim is now achieved by pulling parts of their anatomy this way and that rather than through the use of sliders, too—it sounds awkward, but works out much more intuitive, and it's strapped to a powerful creation engine. Quite how well it translates to a controller remains to be seen, but the molding potential's really something.

However, it wasn't all roses (or rosebuds) for *TS4* upon release in 2014. Fans noted—drumroll—88 missing features from previous games, some of which remain absent to this day. Expect a 'streamlined' *Sims* experience this November, then, free of the clutter that silted up the previous games' experiences, but also possibly feeling a bit light in contrast. Cars, for example, a staple of transportation since *The Sims 1*, are unavailable for purchase or use this time. Toddlers, however, absent until January this year, will be present, correct, and ready to smudge their sticky fingers all over everything on the Xbox version.

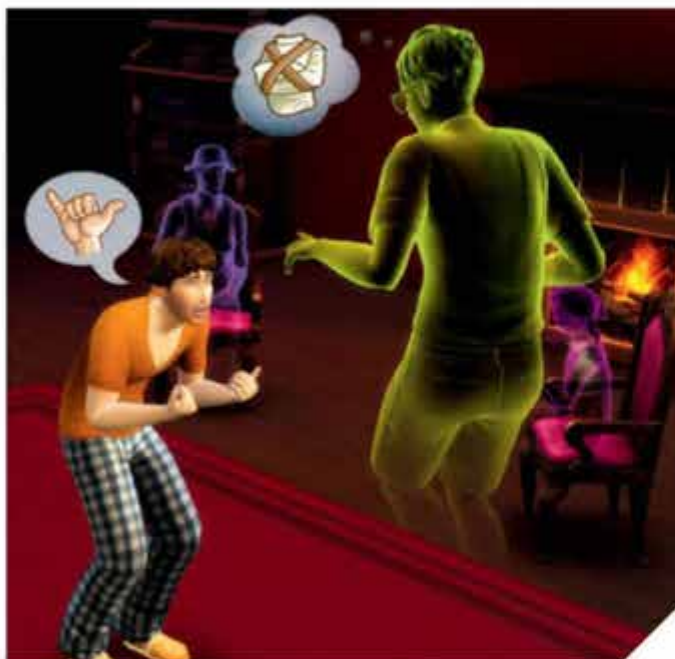
Well, better late than never. *The Sims* has never really clicked on consoles the way it has with its PC audience and their proclivity for modding, but it's nice to be invited to the Perfect Patio party all the same. ■

FEELING FLUID

Here's a progressive move from EA: In summer 2016 an update expanded gender options in the game so that any hairstyle or clothing item could be worn by Sims of either sex, and any adult Sim could become pregnant. We're probably still a while off seeing customization options like that in *COD* multiplayer, but it's a start.

"Perhaps the most immediately obvious change is how Sims emote"





ABOVE Ah, family life: a dizzying parade of primary colors, French toast, and disengaged teenagers.

FAR LEFT Street Chess is clearly the newest and hottest sport around. These guys love it!

LEFT Remember that one cheese dream you had about ghosts? EA made a game of it.

This is Shift's first non-puzzle, non-party game specifically for major consoles

Code Vein

One thing is for certain in this uncertain future: There will be blood

Ian Dransfield

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT DEVELOPER SHIFT
FORMAT XBOX ONE ETA 2018



BUDDYING UP

Code Vein offers players the chance to create their own protagonist, customizing different elements to create a fine fighting hero. This isn't to say we have a complete escape from prefab characters, with a couple revealed so far to accompany the created hero on their journey—Louis, Yakumo, Mia and Io are your compatriots, each offering their own benefits and an element of strategy to play.

The go-to description of any game that attempts to pull together elements like challenging, deep, technical combat, huge enemies, and large, unique worlds to explore is 'like *Dark Souls* crossed with *X*'. It's not fair to developers like Shift, which put in the hours over many years, honing its craft and coming out with something like *Code Vein*: It's like vampires crossed with *Dark Sou...* wait, not that.

In the world of *Code Vein* you control a revenant, taking your superpowered hero through the post-apocalyptic ruins of a world destroyed by a cataclysmic event—and one that's quickly running out of a fresh blood supply as more food sources ('people') are turned into blood-craving vampires themselves. Players have to battle—what else—demonic hellspawn that will pop up, get in your way, and generally be either small and relatively easy to deal with, or massive and something much more akin to a challenge.

The director of *Code Vein*, Hiroshi Yoshimura, is the same chief of the studio's *God Eater* series—a bunch of PSP and Vita (and PS4 ports) adventure-RPGs in the style of *Monster Hunter*. This time around, he and his team are moving in a different direction—a supernatural, anime-inspired world of vampiric

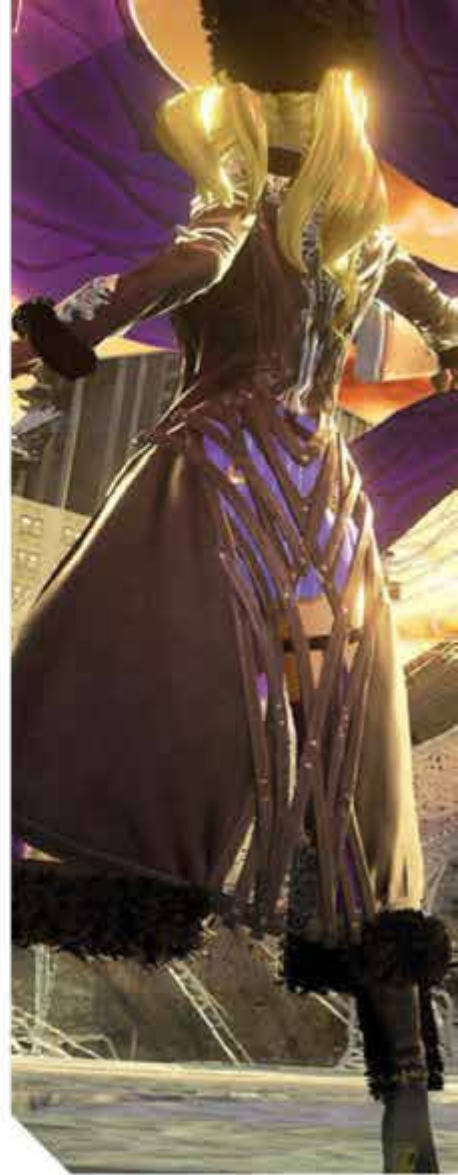
'gifts' and post-apocalyptic non-joy—one that does riff on the *God Eaters* of old, but that pushes things in a new direction for the studio. A bit less RPG, a bit more action. And a lot more blood-sucking.

Creating your destiny

Players take control of a protagonist of their own creation who is capable of harnessing the power of different gifts during battle—you drink blood and get a power boost, you equip special armor and get a stamina boost, that kind of thing. It's a customized buff and debuff system that can be tailored to the way you play, backed up by some engaging, vampiric dynamics and what Shift is referring to as 'high pressure combat'. Which all sounds pretty good, actually. Ladled deliciously on top of all this is a 'focus' system which actively rewards you for putting yourself in danger—when under attack and successfully avoiding/dodging enemies, players will eventually be able to harness a power boost to help them both escape the pressure and feel like a badass at the same time.

You won't be approaching this post-apocalypse alone, though, with players able to partner up with another character—a pre-defined one with their own developer-ascribed looks and sounds and behaviors. Partners help to enhance player skills and can, if needed, share their health points to give a bit of a top-up if and when it's needed—so it's a feature offering a bit more than just a walking set of catchphrases to get in your way as you try to negotiate narrow walkways.

It's a simple, lazy way of doing things to say *Code Vein* is like *Dark Souls* crossed with vampires, or anime, or Namco Bandai as publisher (so... *Dark Souls* then). But sometimes it is an apt description—it fits, and it actually does the game in question a solid through association alone. *Code Vein* looks like it has a strong enough idea on its own to be a success, but being tagged with the *Souls*-like moniker and coming in a time where we are left completely without new *Souls* games, it could well end up plugging quite a big gaming gap. ■



**“Players have to battle—
what else—demonic
hellspawn that will pop up”**



029



ABOVE Enemy designs are on the right side of 'just too muchery', which keeps things interesting.

FAR LEFT Who says a post-apocalyptic world can't be damn stylish to boot? *Code Vein* would disagree.

LEFT Character customization is a welcome element, allowing a more personal approach to battling massive creatures.



ABOVE And you thought we reached peak beard in 2014. Even the ogres are at it now.

RIGHT Avil's frequently outsized by opponents, but never outmaneuvered. Jump, little guy, jump!



Irony Galaxy's list of porting credits includes *Killer Instinct Season 2* and *D4: Dark Dreams Don't Die*

Extinction

Surprisingly, not a game about current North Korea-United States relations

Phil Iwaniuk

PUBLISHER MAXIMUM GAMES DEVELOPER IRON GALAXY
FORMAT XBOX ONE ETA MARCH 31 2018

GAUNTLET THROWN

In addition to the aforementioned flavors of play is an online custom battle mode. Here you set the monsters and environment just as you want them, then go in and beat them all in the quickest time possible, upload your time online and challenge the world to enter your creation and do the same.

Every now and then, a game comes along which can't be neatly categorized as belonging to one particular genre. It doesn't happen very often in these focus-grouped, sequel-hugging times... boy, things were better in the '90s. *New Kids On The Block* were riding high, and the kids were playing a little game called *Doom*, which...

Sorry, got lost for a second there. *Extinction* is a game about killing humongous enemies in fully-destructible environments while bouncing around at platform game pace, which is to say it's quite the genre hybrid. Set in a world besieged by monsters, you play Avil the Sentinel, a chap with some seriously powerful quadriceps. Able to jump and double-jump around the painterly streets, he uses canvas roofs as bounce pads, and can wall-run to string together *Mirror's Edge*-esque parkour sequences. *Seriously* powerful quadriceps, like we said. Oddly enough, his moveset is a bit reminiscent of the *Bionic Commando* reboot from back in 2009, which developer Iron Galaxy assisted with. Particularly his whip, which pulls him towards nearby surfaces.

Avil can also make mincemeat of skyscraper-sized ogres, in the right

hands. It's this David vs Goliath that has us most excited about *Extinction*—you target a particular limb, break down its armor with repeated attacks, and then just hack it off, like ogres are made of butter. Once it's suitably short of appendages, it's a matter of clambering up the beast's back and chopping off the head, upon which a champagne fizz of cartoon viscera explodes onscreen. It's all very videogames. Another friendlier element we haven't seen yet is in actually rescuing the citizens of the towns you fight in and, inevitably, trash in the process. Plenty of scope for some risk/reward when you're fighting foes around the houses of your friendlies.

Titan it up

It'd be weird not to mention *Attack On Titan*, because its influence has obviously seeped into *Extinction*. To watch it in motion though, Iron Galaxy's game is a separate entity. There are no 'complete subjugation!' awards, nor giant babies to slay. This one's going for more of a picture book fairytale atmosphere, with picturesque towns and bucolic countryside invaded by nasty green monsters. Traditional, and pretty easy on the eye.

However due to that mechanical similarity, we can't help but wonder what Iron Galaxy can do to stave off the repetitive trappings of *Attack On Titan*. One solution comes from daily challenges, which make use of the numerous boss variations to present a new scrap. Then there's *Extinction* mode, which is basically a relentless wave-based survival affair. Saving humanity goes out of the window, and setting the longest survival time becomes the be-all and end-all.

Still, we think success for *Extinction* will hinge on the depth and presentation of its campaign. Iron Galaxy call it 'abundant', but then they would say that, wouldn't they? With a few characters to care about and the chance to feel invested in the world, this could be an enriching pastime in the early months of 2018 as our various new year's resolutions evaporate. Without that, there's a danger of monotony creeping in that simply adding ever-bigger bosses won't be able to dislodge. ■

"The Extinction mode is basically a relentless wave-based survival affair"

John Marston's father was Scottish. Here's hoping he pops up in a kilt in *RDR2*

Red Dead Redemption 2

Welcome to a new Western wonderland

Stephen Ashby

PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO
FORMAT XBOX ONE ETA TBC 2018

GANG BUSTERS

It seems that Morgan's gang will play a big part in *Red Dead 2*. We've already seen a few of the members, including an awesome Native American, and it looks like a lot of the game will be played alongside these companions. We still don't know if you'll get to direct them or whether they'll be completely AI controlled, but if we can't use a button prompt to activate a tomahawk throw then Rockstar has missed a trick.

Clean those revolvers and learn how to spit, ladies and gents, because *Red Dead* is back. We've finally been given a longer glimpse at the game, and after some detective work that the previous game's Bureau Of Investigation would be proud of, we've uncovered a whole bunch of cool details about the prequel to Rockstar's Xbox 360 megahit.

First off, yes, this is a prequel, and no, we're also not sure why it's got a 2 at the end—expect a more fitting title to be announced closer to the game's launch. There's more to this than a straight prequel, though; Rockstar has confirmed that we will be slipping on the snakeskin boots of Arthur Morgan in the new title, not a young John Marston as some had assumed. Morgan is an outlaw, and comrade of Dutch Van Der Linde, who you may remember from the first game. Dutch was the leader of the infamous Dutch's Gang—whose members included John Marston and his future wife, Abigail. Does that mean we'll perhaps be *meeting* a young John as we progress through Morgan's story, even if we aren't controlling him?

What makes this setting even more interesting is Morgan's attitude. It's clear that his moral compass is a lot more skewiff than Marston's

in the previous game—we see him threatening the son of a recently widowed woman, holding up a bank, and robbing a train (more on that later). Morgan is wanted by lawmen all over the country—*RDR's* Marston wasn't exactly an angel, but at least he was honorable. It looks like all Morgan wants is money. Hey, we're not complaining; Rockstar loves a flawed character, and Morgan fits the bill.

Go Wild

But let's forget Morgan for a second, and take a look at the Wild West itself. The map for *Red Dead Redemption 2* is going to offer a lot more variation than the previous title – yes, there'll be a cartload of dusty plains to ride across, but you'll also be exploring a swampy bayou, knee-deep snowdrifts, and larger, more industrial railroad areas. A leaked map from more than a year ago suggested a huge area to explore, and some of the clips in the most recent trailer seem to suggest it may be real, but we'll have to wait a little longer to know for sure.

Animals make a return, of course—bears are still absolutely terrifying, but you can also expect to face new wild foes, including alligators that are particularly annoyed about those boots of yours, made from its reptilian buddies. If you're creeping through the bayou at night (and it looks like you're going to be) avoiding these almost-invisible creatures will be key to... well, not getting chomped into little bits.

Back to that train robbery, though. We see Morgan and his crew watching a train pass by at night, and later we see him knocking a driver to the ground next to a stopped locomotive. We're still not sure whether this will be a spontaneous mission that you will be able to complete when a loaded-up train happens to pass by, or something more akin to a *GTA*V heist, with planning stages and a huge final challenge. Either way, the idea of grabbing handfuls of cash from a moving train is one we are absolutely on board with. Yes, that was a pun.

There's still no final release date for *Red Dead 2* (come on Rockstar, get a move on) but it's already shaping up to be one of *the* games of 2018. Better dust off that cowboy hat... ■

“Rockstar loves a flawed character, and Morgan fits the bill perfectly”





033



ABOVE More Westworld than Westworld?

FAR LEFT Built-up areas, like this industrial railroad depot, will offer some variety from all that sand and rock.

LEFT At last, *Red Dead* has got a bow. The local wildlife won't know what's hit it (hint: it's arrows).

Banana skins are a great source of fibre and health points



Sea Of Thieves

Sailing on stormy seas and learning to work together

Daniella Lucas

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT DEVELOPER RARE
FORMAT XBOX ONE ETA EARLY 2018



CREW MATES

Want to try the game early? *Sea Of Thieves* are still regularly running test weekends through the Xbox Insider program, so you can have a go at sailing the high seas yourself while drinking copious amounts of grog.

No matter how much info is released for a game before it comes out, sometimes you don't really know what it's like until you actually get your hands on it. Luckily we managed to get an extended hands-on with this piratical adventure game, with the games devs helping us get into all sorts of mischief while hunting for treasure—and it's an utter delight to wander around in.

After assembling a crew of four and boarding our ship we pick one of several maps of varying difficulty to decipher. There's a simple find-and-retrieve one where all you need is to find the corresponding island on the world map and sail towards it, and a longer voyage sparked by a riddle that you need to decipher to find an island name, which will then trigger another clue for the next step on your journey. Both types provide a nice choice of pace, which is particularly handy if you only have time for a quick play session with your pals.

Once you've figured out how to lift your anchor and found where you need to go, the actual art of sailing is pretty peaceful, with easy-to-understand steering... unless you find yourself in one of the storms that cross the sea. Small waves turn into giant ones that obscure your view as you dip up and down in the wind, and there's a real risk of being struck by

lightning if you're keeping watch in the crow's nest—which we discovered the painful way. Even without spotting enemy ships, the sea can be a worthy adversary in its own right.

In rough seas it's easy to hit things you didn't quite spot and damage your ship to the point it starts taking on water. Luckily, you have plenty of spare planks readily available in an inventory wheel on your left bumper to board up the holes. This is also where you keep your health-regenerating bananas and bucket for bailing out water. You can only pick one at a time, which makes you prioritize one task over others, and somehow adds to the fun and tension of a situation as you bicker among your crew about who is handling what to stop yourself from sinking.

Friendly fire

But there is one major worry—just how well will all of those strangers get along when forced to play together? We all know that online games can get pretty toxic, with insults thrown out at the slightest mistake, so we can't imagine the chaotic nature of captaining a pirate crew going down well with those who would criticize their own friends for missing a shot. Smaller boats will be available in the final game for those who don't want to deal with too many other people, but it's still going to take a lot of work from moderators to keep the seas clean from overly salty pirates and those that don't like to share.

Though with everything in the game set up to encourage goofing around, from the cartoonish design of the characters to the inclusion of ridiculous items such as the hurdy-gurdy, it's the typical competitive online mentality that will feel more out of place. It's going to be pretty difficult to keep insisting on efficient ship management when your crew are too busy slipping on their own vomit after one too many flaggons of grog. Hopefully those who don't revel in the delightful chaos and potential failure of a boat battle will be the ones chased out, rather than those prone to piratical accidents and laughing at their own deaths. It'll be a tough thing to get right for the community, but if anyone can do it, Rare can. ■

“Even without spotting enemy ships the sea can be a worthy adversary”





035



ABOVE You'll often see storm clouds on the horizon so you can steer around them instead of facing them.

FAR LEFT It's rare, but lightning can also strike you while you're on land, knocking off a chunk of your health.

LEFT Cannons take a while to load. Work together to get one person reloading while the other fires.

Xbox Game Pass. **More is better.** **It's math.**

Over 100 great games. Endless play.



Monthly subscription required; continues until cancelled. Game selection varies over time. Learn more at xbox.com/game-pass.





AMERICAN WASTELAND

IS **FAR CRY 5** JUST ANOTHER SHOOTER FOCUSED ON HAVING A FUN TIME, OR DOES IT HAVE SOMETHING MORE PROFOUND TO SAY ABOUT THE WORLD WE LIVE IN?

STEPHEN ASHBY



039





040

BELOW Firing from inside cars isn't easy, but some light aim-assist helps you lock onto your targets.



s a series, *Far Cry* has never really been too concerned about commenting on the wider world. Hell, it's called *Far Cry*—the point is that you're well outside of the normality of life: in some insane situation on a tropical island, or in a mountainous region, or... in primeval times fighting sabre-tooth tigers and hunting mammoths. Okay, that's an extreme example, but you get the point.

But *Far Cry 5* is altering that, with one fairly simple change—the location. By setting the series' fifth core instalment in the US state of Montana, and making the primary antagonists a bearded religious cult, Ubisoft is bringing the action to the familiar fields of the USA. To say this is a brave move is an understatement, and Ubisoft has already taken a degree of flak from certain disgruntled fans, but there's no changing it now—*Far Cry* isn't so far-fetched any more.

But enough of that stuff, because if you're reading this, you probably aren't too worried about the political impact that the game will have. It's more likely that you're wondering how the gunplay and game world compares to the previous games, or you're just looking forward to setting fire to cows using your blowtorch—sorry, we mean Repair Tool. Yes, that is a thing you can do.



LEFT Meet your primary enemy Joseph Seed, who has started calling himself 'the Father'.

BELOW Hope County has plenty of guns for hire if you need them.

NEW FRIENDS!

GUNS FOR HIRE

The overriding feeling that we had when we came away from our hands-on session was that this is the *Far Cry* fans know and love. If you've enjoyed the previous entries in the series and are looking for more, you'll love it. It brings more crazy, likable characters, more optional objectives, more hunting, and more shooting in a massive open world. That's not surprising, but the question is whether *FC5* can add enough new ideas, new features, new... *stuff* to make it worth playing.

The biggest new addition is the companion system, which lets you choose a buddy to come along with you and help out. We've seen and playtested three of these—Nick Rye, the excitable pilot, Grace Armstrong, the driven sniper, and Boomer, the adorable and helpful pup. The menu slots on the screen suggest that you'll be able to assign up to three companions to corresponding directions on the D-pad at once, although we only got to try one at a time in our demo. At a recent event, Ubisoft hinted that there may be more than just these three to unlock in the final game, and we're intrigued to see what these extra characters might offer.

These companions completely change how you approach situations in the game.

In previous *Far Cry* titles, planning out your assaults was essential—tagging enemies, and scoping out opportunities to take out multiple enemies at once could make a fight far easier. That much is still true in *FC5*, but now you can choose the way you approach scenarios, depending on which companion you use. Position Grace up on a hill, for example, and she can draw attention or take out guards from afar while you creep around a base silently taking down others. If you get downed, she can run in and revive you before you see a Game Over screen. Alternatively, call in Boomer for a louder, all-out assault, or Nick, who can drop a huge bomb on the whole scene. Yeah. Have a guess which one is our favorite?

ALL-AMERICAN

Talking of explosions, they look fabulous. The whole game looks pretty, actually—the world that Ubi has created is, once again, an idyllic setting that would be beautiful if it weren't for all the armed cultists and general oppression all over the gaff. Driving around it, wandering through its forests and fields, or even flying over it in Nick's plane, you really appreciate the job that the team has done in recreating what is a very beautiful part of





ABOVE 1. Joseph Seed, leader of Eden's Gate, 2. Jacob Seed, a military veteran, 3. Faith Seed, and her weird wolf pal, 4. John Seed, a family lawyer.

→ America. Sunlight plays through the trees, the sky glows orange at sunset, and the land stretches for miles before disappearing into mountains. As always with *Far Cry*, the digital playground you explore is a real highlight.

Unlike previous entries, however, the path of your play is less pre-planned. The Big Bad in this title is Joseph Seed, a religious nutter who believes the end of the world is nigh, and that the best way to ensure people are safe in the afterlife is to do things like beat up people who disagree with him until they admit he's probably right after all. His two brothers, Jacob and John, are his brutes, forcefully 'converting' those that live in Hope County to his preachings. Meanwhile, his half-sister Faith convinces others with more traditional religious techniques. These three siblings are known as the Heralds, and each one controls a different area of the map. You can choose to take the family on in any order you like, giving you a little more control over how your game plays out. Gone are the radio towers that unlocked parts of the map—in fact, gone is the mini-map entirely. Ubisoft wanted players to stop looking at it to find out what was going on, and instead to look at the game world around them to help them decide where to explore next. Taking back

control of Hope County can happen in any order you like.

What does this entail? Well, a lot of shooting, natch. Our demo starts with a fairly standard set of weapons. Rifles, pistols and Uzis all feature, along with some more unique and, err... inspired choices. Dynamite adds some classic American boom to proceedings, while wielding a star-spangled baseball bat is probably the most melee fun we've had since *Doom*. Of course, bullets are your primary way to bring the pain, but there's nothing like dishing out some all-American justice with a red, white and blue bludgeon. Sadly, there was no bow in our playthrough, but it's been confirmed that everyone's favorite silent tool of death will return.

There's that Repair Tool, too, but don't be fooled by that name. You can set fire to *all sorts* of things with it. Apply it to a surface for a few seconds and you might wonder why you start taking damage. In seconds the building (and you, if you were dumb enough to do it while standing inside) will be engulfed. Again, this can be used to your advantage—why not flush out some nasties with a bit of flame? If there's one thing *Far Cry 5* does well, it's give you all the tools you need to have fun in the world around you.





"This time you'll be able to fly planes—which in some cases will be armed to the teeth"

FLYING HIGH

This time, that toolset has been expanded further. While *Far Cry 4* offered a small helicopter-like vehicle to hover around in, this time you'll be able to fly planes—which in some cases will be armed to the teeth. For one mission we take part in a bombing run in Nick's plane, and that thing is fully loaded with machine guns, bombs, and even rockets. Soon after we bomb the heck out of people, an enemy plane zooms into view and we're in a dogfight. It's fair to say that the enemy AI isn't the most advanced in this section—flying in straight lines lets us easily line up shots on him—but that may change for the final game. Knowing where your opponent is can be tough in the first-person view, especially if they fly past you, or are directly above or below, but for the most part the plane is simple to control. Admittedly we did, at one point, fly a little too close to a

convoy we were meant to be destroying and the plane caught fire, but aside from that slight mishap, we are aerial aces.

If your plane does catch fire (unexpectedly and through no fault of your own), you can always leap out and pull a parachute, letting rip with your Uzi as you land. Plus, the wingsuit will make a triumphant return—this time with more reasons to swoop dangerously close to trees. Ubisoft has created a stuntman character, and the things that you do with the wingsuit, as well as other tricks and stunts that you do around the game world, will be paying a homage to him as a historical figure in the game lore. Perhaps the *Steep* team has been giving Ubisoft Montreal some advice on great wingsuit physics? We can only hope.

Animal-based entertainment is also back—aside from your doggo pal, you'll also find all manner of fauna out in the Montana

COME VISIT!

Why not take an all-American trip to picturesque Montana?



AMAZING MOUNTAINS
Become one with nature with a hike in the beautiful mountains! It's the perfect place

to spot wildlife and explore the real Montana.



STUNNING RIVERS
Why not spend a relaxing afternoon fishing with a local guide? Or, if fishing isn't your

thing, take to the skies to see God's country from the air?



THE OPEN ROAD
If you want to see more of our beautiful state, why not take a road

trip? With so much to see, you'll never forget the time you spend here.



FRIENDLY LOCALS
You'll meet some truly special people in Hope County. Get a closer look at

country life and find out what it means to live in a small town in Montana.

1

2

3

NICK RYE

BOOMER

GRACE ARMSTRONG

1 A crop duster by trade, Nick comes from a family of distinguished military airmen. With a child on the way and the crazy cultists of Eden's Gate knocking at his door, Nick will do pretty much anything to protect his family—including dropping bombs from his aeroplane in any location you mark with the D-pad. Handy!

2 Your pet pup looks adorable, and will happily take out guards or distract enemies for you—and he will even bring their guns back to you in his slobbery chops. The most important news that we can give you, though, is that you can pet him with a button press, and when you do so he will lick your face. Best game ever?

3 Deadly from a distance, Grace is a sniper and a staunch member of the resistance. Point at an enemy you want her to hit, and they'll go down with a perfect headshot—time this well and you can execute synchronized kills to take out two enemies at once, silently. She's a great ally, and can even revive you when you go down.



ABOVE You can use your dynamite stash to blow up cultists, or catch fish with exceptional efficiency.

→ wilds. Expect wolves, plenty of deer, and the odd bear wandering into town when you least expect it. We did a little hunting—following on from Ubi's desire to drop the mini-map, we were interested to see that when we caught a glimpse of a signpost warning us about deer crossing the road, an on-screen message informed us that this area would be listed as deer country if we needed to come back later. This is a great idea for a discovery system—the signposts themselves were highlighted on-screen when we got close, and a quick look added it. Taking in your surroundings really will be important here.

Later, we stumbled across some wolves (literally—we stepped through a bush and RAWR! Goddam wolves). Luckily, we had our Freedom Bat out, and whacked one of them on the bonce before he could even think about biting us. After grabbing its meat and pelt and unloading a clip into the other in a sheer panic, we headed down to the stream for a spot of fishing.

Unfortunately, it looks like fishing is really not our thing. We grabbed the rod from a nearby hut and after casting and getting a bite, we got overexcited, reeled like a madman and broke the line. Ubisoft had made the fishing far more realistic that we anticipated. Knowing when to reel and when to let go, pulling at the right angle, and judging your line tension based on the amount of rumble coming through your controller are all essential if you want to land a catch. After what must have been 15 minutes of trying, and with an increasingly large audience watching our screen, we finally managed to catch a 10lb fish. The Ubisoft rep watching told us that the largest catch he'd seen was a 52lb beast, immediately diminishing our achievement. Thanks for that. Unfortunately, we'd used all of our dynamite on the cultists early in

the demo, so we couldn't lob any into the apparently fish-rich river, otherwise we could've stuffed that unknown person's 52-pounder up his or her overly talented ass. We chucked in some meat, but apparently the fish weren't interested, the bastards. In case you can't tell, by the end of our fishing experience we were feeling pretty irked. Isn't a spot of fishing meant to be relaxing? Screw that.

TAKE THE LEAD

Thankfully, there are loads of ways to take out frustrations. There are plenty of things to blow up (a tip of the hat to you, red barrels), and lots of smaller tasks to take on, most of which involve shooting some thugs. Sniping is tougher than previous games—you'll need to lead your targets, making moving enemies particularly hard to hit—and non-scoped rifles have bullet drop, making long shots difficult, but not impossible. At one point, we sniped a baddie driving a tractor from across two fields while aiming well over his head.

The final game promises more missions, more challenges, and more characters, too. By bringing the world of *Far Cry* to the States, Ubisoft is asking a lot of big questions. Dan Hay, the lead director for *FC5* (who was also lead producer on the excellent *FC3*, which bodes well for this sequel) has said that the team wants players to meet characters who aren't clearly good or bad—there are conversations you'll experience that don't have a right or wrong side, so the player will have to form their own opinions. With writing led by Drew Holmes, who previously worked on *BioShock Infinite* and its DLC, it appears that Ubisoft is working hard on making this *Far Cry* hit closer to home than ever. It could be the kick that the series needs to keep things fresh and players interested. We'll find out when the game lands on February 27. ■



Q&A: TONY GRONICK

WE TALK TO FAR CRY 5'S AUDIO DIRECTOR TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HOW HYMNS WILL SHAPE THE GAME EXPERIENCE

How has the setting of *Far Cry 5* shaped the music in the game?

TG Each region has the ten hymns, but really it's like 30, because there are three different interpretations of them. At first we thought, let's make the music as annoying as possible so people would really wanna kill the cult. But when we started making it more beautiful, we began to understand how someone who truly believes could be inspired by this music. And I do find myself humming and singing these songs myself.

Will players notice different tracks in different areas of the map?

TG Well, we start with the Father, and as it branches out there are different interpretations of that music by other family members. So when you get to a region, it might sound more industrial than Americana. But the music still matches, because you know the hymns. You know the songs, the melodies. So there is a cohesiveness there. You won't hear the score and the hymns competing, but you will hear familiar melodies in the score. In the industrial region, it'll take a bit more investigation to hear the connection.

045



THE XBOX ONE X LAUNCH GUIDE

It's here at last. This month, we got a magical little box in the post, and as you'll see over the next 30 pages or so, we've had our hands all over it to find out everything you need to know. The first thing we did (after crying with happiness and introducing it to our parents) was take it down to our photo studio to snap a few glamour shots, and here you'll get to see it in all its sleek, Xboxy glory.

First things first, then—let's get up close and personal with the box itself. There's plenty of power packed into the smallest Xbox Microsoft has ever shipped, but you wouldn't know it from the unassuming design. For those that already have an Xbox One S, the ports on the outside will look familiar, but it's under the hood where the X really shines. Let's take a closer look at what you'll get with your brand new, power-packed Xbox... ■

EJECT

Forget the annoying (and often accidentally pressed) touch-sensitive buttons of the original Xbox One. This bad boy is all physical, and clicks pleasingly.

IR BLASTER

With no Kinect in the box, this little thing will allow you to control things like your TV and other devices from your Xbox One X. One device to rule them all.



ABOVE The top section is a little wider than the S, but the whole console is slightly flatter and smaller overall.



ABOVE The X is the first Xbox One model without any fan outlets on top of the box—all the vents are around the edges.

POWER PORT

Like the S, the Xbox One X's power brick is inside the box itself, which helps keep your room tidier, and lets the Xbox regulate the power converter's temperature.



DISC SLOT

We aren't quite ready for an all-digital future just yet, but Microsoft has done its best to hide the disc slot of the X under the lip. It is there though, trust us.



SYNC

Syncing your controller can be done by pressing this button, then holding the sync button on your controller. Up to eight controllers can connect to a single console!

HDMI

Use the HDMI in port to connect any TV boxes you may own and you can turn everything on at once, controlling your TV and set-top box using your Xbox controller.

USB

If you choose to use Kinect, you'll need an adapter plugged into the left-hand USB port. The other works great for an external hard drive to expand your storage.

OPTICAL AUDIO

For the best audio experience, you can connect a headset or your speaker system directly to the Xbox One X's optical audio port.



POWER BUTTON

Much like on the Xbox One S, the power button on the X is a wonderfully clicky thing. Press it and be bathed in light as the 4K goodness starts up.

SIDE VENTS

The prototype console was designed with vents around the edges so that developers could stack multiple units on top of each other while testing. Jeez, we wish we could afford more than one!

OPTIONAL STAND

One side of the console has a slight overhang. It's at this end that you attach the optional stand if you want to store your Xbox One X vertically.

CONTROLLER

The X comes with the same new controller design as the S, but in all black. We're a little disappointed that an Elite Controller isn't included in the box, but we guess you can't have everything.

USB 3.0 PORT

This will likely be your first port (ha!) of call for charging controllers and accessories. You could also plug in a hard drive—or a novelty USB fan.





XBOX ONE X SETUP GUIDE

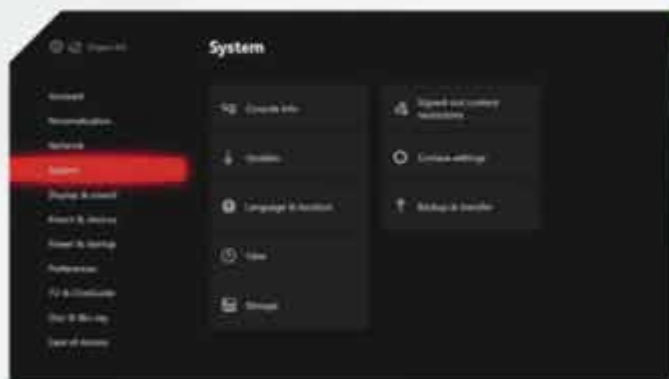
Be prepared and avoid launch day frustrations

Are you upgrading from an Xbox One or Xbox One S to the 4K-ready Xbox One X? If you are, you'll find that Microsoft has systems in place that make it as easy as possible to switch consoles.

It has introduced a number of new OS features to help make the experience seamless, although there are of course still a few bumps in the road. That's why this setup guide should get you up to speed with the

basics, and help you get ahead of the game when your brand new console lands on your doorstep in November. You can move most of your existing content over using a hard drive, but if you want to enjoy true 4K gaming right from the start, you'll want to get your updates downloaded ahead of time—once you have everything transferred, you'll be able to start playing instantly.

Confused? Don't worry, that's why we're here! Read on to find out how to make your transition that little bit easier... ■



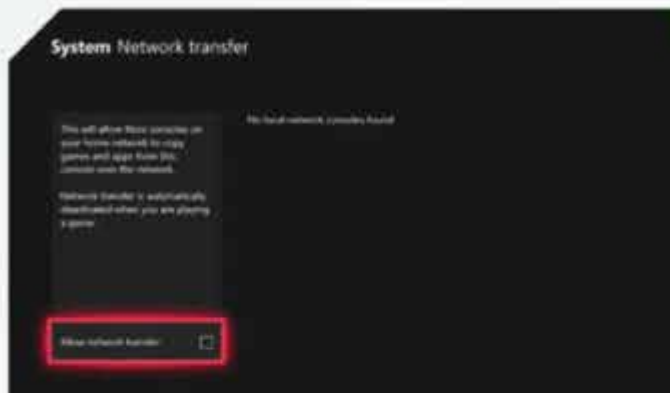
1. BACK UP YOUR SETTINGS

Xbox One users will be able to back up their existing console settings onto an external USB drive. This can be done in Settings > System > Backup & Transfer. Then connect the device and apply the settings during the initial setup process on your Xbox One X.



2. PREPARE FOR 4K

These 4K game patches are already available, and the downloads are huge. Try and get ahead of the curve by downloading this content in advance—go to Settings > System and look for 'Updates'. You can later transfer these via USB or over your home network.



3. NETWORK TRANSFER

Should you have your Xbox One set up at home and connected to your secure home network, you'll actually be able to copy your games and apps directly between the systems. This feature can be activated in Settings, System, and then 'Backup & Transfer'.



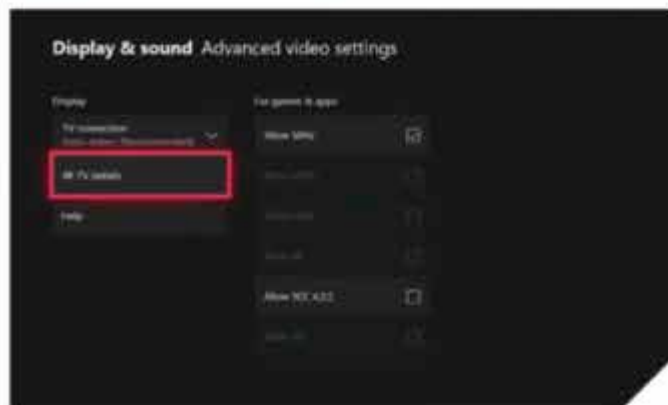
5. GO BACK THROUGH YOUR LIBRARY

With over 100 games receiving 4K updates, it's time to consult your library and work out which ones need to be given another chance. Xbox One exclusives, such as *Halo 5: Guardians* and *Quantum Break*, are great shouts, but keep any eye out for any third-party surprises.



4. CALIBRATE YOUR TV

Playing in 4K is great, but if you don't set your TV up right, the picture quality will suffer, particularly when dealing with HDR-enhanced games. Go into Display & Sound in your Xbox Settings, and you'll find the option to calibrate your TV under the Video Output menu.



6. BE WARY OF CABLES

To get the most out of your Xbox One X, particularly through a 4K TV, you'll want to ensure you have the right cables. Don't be fooled by specifically branded '4K HDMI' or '2.0 HDMI' cables, and just ensure that yours is 'HDMI High Speed' branded.

ACTIVATE CORTANA ON YOUR ONE X



1. ACTIVATE CORTANA

Open System Settings and you'll find the appropriately titled 'Cortana Settings'. So long as you have your Kinect plugged in, you'll be walked through the set-up.



2. USE CORTANA

To trigger an activation of Cortana, all you need to do is say "Hey Cortana!" and it should spring into action. A word of warning: Doing your best Master Chief impression won't help.



3. SIMPLE COMMANDS

Keep your instructions simple; "Xbox Turn Off" or "Record That" for example. Once you're comfortable with Cortana, try using it to invite friends to parties and online games.



BEST XBOX ONE X ACCESSORIES

Take your gaming seriously with these incredible additions to your home console setup

XBOX ELITE CONTROLLER

Super comfortable, versatile and customisable, the Xbox Elite Controller is the preferred gamepad for anybody looking to take their gaming seriously. It's one of the best official peripherals available to Xbox players.

xbox.com \$139.99 / £119.99

XBOX ONE X

The Xbox One X will play nice with all the Xbox One accessories you already own, so you can just switch all your cables and connections over and start playing right away.

xbox.com \$499.99 / £449.99



KINECT

Kinect may not have many practical game applications, but it's still the best way to connect with viewers on Twitch and Mixer. It's also a welcome hand-free alternative to using the controller to navigate the dashboard.

xbox.com \$79.99 / £79.99

TURTLE BEACH ELITE 800X

This premium wireless surround sound gaming headset offers active noise cancellation, wireless game, and chat audio, and amazing DTS Headphone:X 7.1 Surround Sound to let you pick out every last sound while you play.

turtlebeach.com
\$229.95 / £179.99

SEAGATE XBOX GAME DRIVE HUB 8TB

With space to save over 200 games, the Game Drive Hub is the best solution to combat ever-escalating download sizes. High-speed USB 3.0 performance means you may even see small improvements to the loading times of your favorite games, too.

seagate.com
£239.99 / \$239.99

**RAZER WOLVERINE ULTIMATE CONTROLLER**

The Wolverine is one of the very best controllers on the market; comfortable and customizable, equipped with interchangeable parts and Razer Chroma lighting. It's purpose-built to ensure that it suits all of your high-end gaming needs.

razerzone.com \$159.99 / £159.99

**XBOX ONE DIGITAL TV TUNER**

This USB accessory will let you watch digital TV on your Xbox One X, giving you access to premium live TV services without a set-top box or subscription. US users will need the Hauppauge model.

xbox.com \$59.99 / £16.99

**XBOX KINECT ADAPTER**

Still want to use your Kinect? While the Xbox One X doesn't include the connectivity port as standard, this adapter will let you use the sensor to your heart's content.

xbox.com \$39.99 / £29.99

**THRUSTMASTER TMX FORCE FEEDBACK STEERING WHEEL**

Looking for the ultimate racing accessory? Complement your *Forza Motorsport* gaming with this adjustable force feedback wheel, letting you feel every detail on the track.

thrustmaster.com \$199.99 / £139.99

**SENNHEISER GAME ONE OVER-EAR GAMING HEADSET**

Loved by professional gamers for its clarity and versatility, the Game One delivers a sublime sound experience. It's also one of the most comfortable gaming headsets currently on the market.

en-us.sennheiser.com \$199.99 / £189.99

**XBOX CHATPAD**

Sending messages using the virtual keyboard can be slow. That's why the Chatpad is the best alternative, adding a full QWERTY keyboard and two programmable keys to your controller.

xbox.com \$34.99 / £29.99

**XBOX ONE STEREO HEADSET ADAPTER**

This handy adapter will let you use your favorite stereo headset with any controller, and full control over chat and game audio with a press.

xbox.com \$19.99 / £19.99



XBOX ONE X TIPS & TRICKS

Get the most out of your new system

The latest update to the Xbox One system software has added a whole bunch of new features and abilities to your console. The whole dashboard has been completely redesigned, making it easier to customize your screen and quicker to load the things you want to access.

Do you only want your favorite games to appear when you log in? No problem—just add it as a content block. Want to stay up-to-date with what your friends have been playing?

Simply add them to your Home screen to get regular updates. If you're new to the Xbox family, or just looking to streamline some of your old gaming habits, **OXM** has picked out some of its favorite quick tips and tricks to help get you up to speed with brand new Xbox One dashboard. Once you've got these basics down, it's well worth having a nose around in some of the other settings, too. The Xbox One X is a flexible device, especially with all the new features on offer, and with all that power at its disposal, the interface runs more smoothly than ever. ■

GET RIGHT INTO THE ACTION

Sign in fast so you can concentrate on playing your games

If you really want to speed up your Xbox One X experience, you are going to want to head into the Settings app and enable these options to streamline the startup process. First, head to Account and activate 'Instant Sign-In'—that'll save you a world of hassle. Next, scroll down to Power & Startup and choose the 'Instant-on' power mode to enable a faster startup time and the ability to boot straight into games from where you left off the previous night by re-loading the application.

Sign in when this Xbox starts?

As soon as this Xbox is turned on, you will be ready to play.

Use instant sign-in

Cancel

HOW TO CUSTOMIZE YOUR CONTROLLER



1. HEAD TO SETTINGS

Once you are inside the Settings app on your console, open the Kinect & Devices menu. Make sure that you've got your Xbox One controller at the ready.



2. SELECT YOUR DEVICE

Every device you have paired with your console will be listed. Find the controller that you want to customize, hit 'Configure', and head into 'Button Mapping' to get started.



3. CHANGE IT UP

From here you can remap every button on the controller to suit your preferences, permanently invert the X/Y axes, or swap the functionality on the triggers, for example.

CUSTOMIZING THE NEW DASHBOARD

The games, pins, and apps you want, right at your fingertips



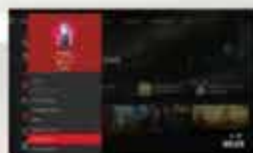
SET PINS

The easiest and most efficient way to customize your dashboard is to add pins. Hover over a tile in your library, click the menu button, and select 'Add To Pins' to add it to your dash.



MANAGE YOUR PINS

Once pins are on your dashboard, they can be moved and deleted. Scroll to the Pins content block, hover over one, and press 'Y' to re-order them. Press the menu button to remove them entirely.



ADD CONTENT BLOCKS

Any game, app, or friend can be turned into its very own content block. This puts the things you care about most front and center. Find what you want, hit that menu button, and 'Add To Home.'



CUSTOMIZE CONTENT BLOCKS

Press Y when you're on the Home screen, and you'll be able to move, re-order, or remove blocks, should you decide you're changing your game up a little bit, or find a new favorite.



PERSONALIZE THE DASH

You can add a custom accent color or change the background of your dashboard from Settings. Hit Personalization and head into the My Color & Background menu.

053



GET SUBSCRIPTIONS

If you want to save some money, you should think about signing up to either the Xbox Game Pass or EA Access. We especially like Game Pass—for a monthly fee you'll gain access to over 100 Xbox titles to play while your subscription is active, including some that have been updated for 4K.

ADD A CUSTOM GAMERPIC

This feature has been years in the making—you can now upload a custom Gamerpic to your Xbox One profile. Try loading a photo onto an external storage device and just plug it directly into the USB port of your system. Then, head to Profile to change your Gamerpic, your Club's profile, or your Xbox One dash.



LINK A CONTROLLER

Do you have multiple Xbox Live users in your home using the same Xbox One X? Why not link Gamertags to specific controllers? Head into Settings > Account and select 'Controller Sign-In'. Then, as soon as the Xbox button on a specific gamepad is pressed, the player linked to that controller will be signed in.

POWER BOOST

HOW DEVELOPERS ARE GIVING YOUR GAMES A
HUGE UPGRADE FOR XBOX ONE X **DANIELLA LUCAS**





With the world's most powerful console finally within arm's reach, there's been one question that's been sitting at the back of our minds for months now: Just how do you go about 'enhancing' a game for the Xbox One X? A lot of the games that are due to receive updates to make the most of the console's enhanced processing power have been out already for a year or two now, or have been designed with the original Xbox One spec in mind first. So how do you take a game and make it work completely differently for an upgraded console? We spoke to The Coalition behind *Gears Of War 4*, Bill Giese, the creative director of *Forza Motorsport* at Turn 10 Studios, and Barry Feather, the executive producer for *Halo Wars 2* at 343 Industries on how the three studios managed it.

First, it's a case of actually deciding on what you actually want to do with all of that extra power. "With *Halo Wars 2* this was a pretty straightforward decision to make," Barry Feather tells us. "We wanted to support the improved visuals that the Xbox One X is capable of, we were still in active development on our expansion—*Awakening The Nightmare*—and we also had a lot of assets to support the visual enhancements because we already shipped it in 4K on PC. So we focused our efforts on implementing 4K, HDR and Intelligent Install on Xbox One X."

Mike Rayner, Colin Plenty and Jaysen Huculak from The Coalition (studio technical director, technical art director, and lead engineer respectively) all clubbed together when talking to us. "Not every game will use the additional power the same way. It's completely up to the developer how to use that power and what makes sense for their game. There are no hard requirements from Microsoft around resolution or framerate, for instance. What's great about having your title available across the Xbox One family of devices is that Xbox One X Enhanced titles will continue to work optimally on Xbox One S while scaling up to leverage the full power on Xbox One X as the developer sees fit."

"We had a bit of a head start because



TOP Is this from the game or the TR movie? We can't tell!

RIGHT Fighting games have never looked so good.



we already had higher-res assets from our Windows 10 PC version," Feather tells us of *Halo Wars 2*'s enhancements. "We packaged them using the new Intelligent Delivery system so that only Xbox One X players need to download them. We also brought over HDR support from our Xbox One S version, and that was pretty straightforward as well."

Being developed during the run up to the console's launch, the devs behind *Forza Motorsport 7* had a different approach. "It was

"There are a lot of features on the new devkits that make development faster," says Feather. "Everything from a better development hard drive, to faster installs, to increased debug memory all help us turn things around more quickly. Since Xbox One X uses the same APIs as the other Xbox units, and Windows 10 PC in almost all cases, it's very easy to get support up and running."

"It was quite easy to get the game looking great on Xbox One X and running smoothly," The Coalition tell us. "We had the game up and running on the hardware the day it arrived. The performance exceeded our expectations, which led us to enable more enhanced features, and push to add a new Performance mode option. With the additional horsepower and increased memory of Xbox One X, we are now able to show the

"This is the first console with enough power to deliver a true 4K gaming experience"

built in tandem for all platforms, including the Xbox One X," says Turn 10's Bill Giese. "Building for 4K and HDR, we developed new tools and techniques, including adopting photogrammetry. This uses photos to recreate real-world objects. As we brought this technology into our game, it expanded the level of detail of our environments."

Building blocks

But just how simple is it to actually get your game up and running on new hardware?

art from *Gears Of War 4* at the native detail levels and resolution it was authored at. Our cross-platform game-engine scales to support a wide range of graphics options and resolutions which are already battle tested in our PC version. It was a simple matter of enabling and tuning to get the best balance of visuals and performance.

"This is the first console with enough power to deliver a true 4K gaming experience. The increase in immersion with 4K, HDR, Wide Color Gamut enhanced by Dolby Atmos has



not been seen since the jump from SD to HD. Developers have the option to use the power in whatever way makes the most sense for their game. We expect the best versions of console games will be on Xbox One X."

The process of refining your work for the world's most powerful console also has some unexpected effects, as 343 found out when updating *Halo Wars 2*. "The work for supporting 4K propagates out to the team in some ways that you might not expect," says Feather. "For example, even our online services have to be aware of 4K support in order to do things like serve up a higher-resolution image for our Message of the Day, depending on your screen resolution. Now that the team's gone through this process, everyone's gained a bit of '4K awareness', even people whose jobs aren't primarily focused on graphics."

Future-proof

Now that the Xbox One X is finally going to be in players' hands, we can start looking towards what's in store for the future and how such a powerful console will affect the gaming landscape. "I think that powerful hardware is always a forcing function for

iteration and advancement in the games industry," says Feather. "We've seen the proliferation of powerful PC CPUs and GPUs driving higher framerates and more complex scene construction in FPS games historically. I think the Xbox One X will have similar effect for console games. More games will target higher framerates and improved visual fidelity with the extra power that the Xbox One X provides, without sacrificing other features to achieve those great looks. This will be particularly relevant as we see the 4K/HDR TVs become more mainstream."

Bill Giese from Turn 10 is even more optimistic: "Like the generational shift to high definition in the late 1990s, I'm excited to see how 4K and HDR become the standard in media content not just in games, but movies and television as well." We can't help but agree: The launch of the Xbox One X marks a huge turning point not just for gaming, but for tech in a household setting. Like the jump from DVDs to Blu-rays, the world is on the cusp of a huge technical leap forward when it comes to entertainment, with gaming and Microsoft leading the charge on 7 November by making it more accessible to millions of gamers around the world. ■

TECH EXPLAINED

4K This refers to a game's resolution, or how high definition it is. So while a normal Xbox plays at 1080 x 1920, your Xbox One X can play at 3840 x 2160. There are also two types of 4K—Native 4K, which is the real deal and is super high def, and checkerboard 4K, which is actually a 3K resolution that is then boosted up to 4K with a scaling program. It's still far better than what a normal console can deliver, but it's not quite as sharp as true 4K.

HDR This stands for 'high dynamic range', and refers to the range of colors you can see at any one time. With HDR, you can see far more detail than normal thanks to boosted colors letting you distinguish details more easily. You'll notice it most in dark areas, as the subtleties of blacks will be far easier to see.

FPS This refers to frames-per-second and how smoothly a game runs. Many games tend to run at 30fps, but the X's power will be able to boost some to 60fps, so action will feel more fluid.

DRAW DISTANCE This determines how far into the distance you can see in a game, so for example, walking in a *Skyrim* forest you might be able to see a lot of trees nearby and then more will pop in as you get closer, but with a greater draw distance powered by Xbox One X you'd be able to see far more details at much longer distances at the same time. You'll also get less of that pesky pop-in.



Best of the boosts

THE GAMES YOU CAN
GET RIGHT NOW TO TEST
THE POWER OF YOUR
AWESOME **XBOX ONE X**

The Xbox One has been out for almost four years now, and has an extensive library of fantastic games to enjoy, but with the power of Xbox One X finally within reach, a lot of those games are now getting facelifts to take advantage of all of that extra tech. From 4K graphics to boosted performances and fancy, detail-enhancing lighting, there's a lot to get excited about. While there are a lot of exciting games on the horizon such as *Crackdown 3* and *Sea Of Thieves*, there are still plenty of games that you can get *right now* that will show you just what the machine is capable of. These are the games to pick up at launch to make the most of it..

06

INJUSTICE 2

We were astounded by how great the faces in this game looked when we reviewed it back in May, but the upcoming resolution and HDR enhancements means there's a risk we'll be getting the characters in the brawler confused with real people. Being a side-on fighter played in quite tight spaces you'll really get a chance to take in the graphical improvements just by being able to get up a little closer to them. We're also hoping the increased processing power of the console will keep the game running smoother than Superman's hair—a must with superpowered fisticuffs.



08

GEARS OF WAR 4

This high-octane shooter originally released in October last year, but has received loads of content updates since, and is now going to look better than ever thanks to an update on November 7 for Xbox One X owners. The game will now run natively in 4K, which means it'll be four times the resolution of the current game if you want your adventure to look extra pretty, but they've also got a 'performance' mode in store that instead puts all of the console's processing power into keeping campaign and horde mode running extra smoothly. You'll still get a huge graphical boost with the mode, but not quite as much as the 'Visuals' mode, but it's great to be able to make the choice yourself.



05

FINAL FANTASY XV

So while this epic RPG won't quite run in true 4K, it will still benefit greatly from the X's processing power. Being an open-world RPG there are a lot of things going on at the same time, for instance all the buildings, monsters and cars you see out in the world, so all that extra power will help keep it all ticking over smoothly. *FFXV* is also getting a boost to its draw-distance, allowing you to take in more of the gorgeous world of Eos at once, including seeing all of the creatures gallivanting around the countryside. It's also getting HDR so you'll be able to see loads more detail, even in caves and dungeons.

07

HALO WARS 2

As well as getting a 4K boost to make all of your strategy meetings look better, the game has also received a recent expansion with *Awakening The Nightmare*. So not only does the game look fabulous now, with some particularly flashy explosions, but you've also got a whole heap of new content to get stuck into. The graphical changes make a real difference, with the improved resolution making it easier for you to make snap strategy decisions and recognize units more quickly. In particular, the color range has been enhanced, which works really well with the *Halo* universe's bright design.



04

DOOM

This is one of those games that looks absolutely fantastic on PC if you can afford a high-end rig—something that's always been out of reach for console owners. Until now that is. Thanks to the power of the Xbox One X, players can expect the kind of performance you'd find on the best of PCs all neatly wrapped in a little box under your TV for your convenience. The *Doom* enhancements are pushing for a silky smooth 60fps so you'll get the ultimate shooter experience. Of course, it will also be getting all of the graphical boosts you'd expect, so you'll be able to pop heads in gloriously high definition.



03

THE WITCHER 3

Now is the time to dig out your old copy of the greatest open-world game released to date, and revisit it with all of the enhanced bells and whistles it deserves. Just imagine strolling through Novigrad in 4K, or even just the countryside with its wind-blasted forests and rolling hills. The update is promised for 'before the end of the year' so might not quite make it for the consoles launch, but this will be the game to get just for the sheer spectacle of it. Naked Geralt lounging in his bath tub has never looked better.



02

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

If you want to test what the Xbox One X can do then this is the game you'll want to add to your collection. It has a few different choices for its enhancements that let you prioritize if you want to run the game with full native 4K resolution, enhance lighting and textures, or if you want to go down the slicker performance route that will give you slightly less of a visual boost, but will make all of that leaping about and tomb-exploring far smoother. We look forward to experimenting to find out just which type of enhanced performance we prefer.



01 FORZA MOTORSPORT 7S

This is *the* poster child for Xbox One X. We're not sure how many goats the developers had to sacrifice, but there definitely must be some witchcraft involved to make a game look this good. It's especially apparent in how the cars look as they tear around a track, the shifts in light direction reflect off of the cars' surfaces so naturally sometimes you forget that they're not real. They've also managed to keep a consistently high performance, so the game is promised to run just as well as it looks. The devs have been so good at making enhancements for the console, that they've even advised other developers on how to approach their own enhancements. If you take the plunge and buy an X, make sure you grab this to show it off at its best. ■



059



VIEW



Your gaming month sorted with
our definitive reviews

Cuphead features bosses based on Egyptian gods, mechanical moons, slot machines, and many more



HOW WE SCORE:

Can't make sense of our out-of-ten rating system? Then see below for your at-a-glance guide.

- 10 A gaming masterpiece
- 9 An essential slice of brilliance
- 8 Give it a whirl and you won't regret it
- 7 Some minor flaws but still good
- 6 Solid, but not setting any loins aflame
- 5 Average. Not good, but not terrible either
- 4 Honks just a bit
- 3 Look away, lest ye be tainted
- 2 Angry-makingly bad
- 1 Just... no...

Titles with this symbol are on Game Preview, so while they aren't finished, you can still find out if they're worth playing.



Irrespective of score, the Editor's Choice award is given to games with the quality, ambition or uniqueness to stand out from the crowd.

The gaming busy-season is upon us, so we're going to ease in slowly with a proper warm-up of thumb-stretches and sofa sit-ups to get us prepared for the months ahead. It'll be a time of plenty, but remember not to over-indulge on all of the digital delights coming out in the run-up to Christmas.

Don't become a gaming glutton. First, we're kicking things off with a few games of soccer with **FIFA 18** (p62) to get into the frantic rhythm of tight matches and team management. Next, it's time for a detour with **Forza Motorsport 7** (p66) to check out just how many beautiful cars our eyeballs can handle in preparation for the glorious 4K future with the Xbox One X. Next, it's time to maximize your social skills by learning to keep tabs on all of your enemies so you know who to dominate and when in **Middle-earth: Shadow Of War** (p68). Differentiate between enemies you can turn to work for you and friends who will turn on you at the slightest accidental head-bludgeoning. We were trying to hit the bad orc behind you, honest. Finally, it's time to get your heart rate going with a challenge in the shape of **Cuphead** (p74). Don't be fooled by its charming animations, this beast is seriously tricky to overcome, and will push your reactions and co-op skills to breaking point. After that, you'll be ready for any gaming challenge thrown at you.



062



066



068



074

061

→ KEEP UP TO DATE WITH THE LATEST OXM REVIEWS AT WWW.GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM



PUBLISHER EA SPORTS / DEVELOPER EA CANADA / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST \$59.99

FIFA 18

EA'S CHART-CONQUERING SOCCER EXTRAVAGANZA STALLS **DAVE MEIKLEHAM**

Updating EA's soccer goliath every year must be a nightmare. Striking the right balance between thoughtful

progression and familiar footy fare that won't alienate the series' millions of fans no doubt requires a Herculean effort. After all, once you've mastered cooking a Big Mac, you don't insert a slice of foie gras just to win over the snootiest part of your potential audience. The trouble with *FIFA 18* though, is that it keeps the assured, yet slightly stale recipe too safe.

Is EA's latest the most exhaustively put together soccer package on Xbox? Unquestionably. The new iteration of *PES* may have an advantage when both rivals trot out onto the turf, but when it comes to official team and league licenses, authenticity, and big budget pizzazz, *FIFA 18* is the most convincingly seductive soccer experience you'll find today. That said,

ABOVE Arjen Robben is one tough customer—even though he wears gloves.

aside from a handful of small new features, and some welcome Career Mode additions, there's no denying EA Canada's latest squad is going through the motions.

Before we get to bigger complaints, how do the new gameplay additions shake out on the field? Well, the most readily noticeable change comes with Player Personality. Previously, one of the chief criticisms you could level at *FIFA* was the majority of players felt too similar, with pace being the one big outlier when it came to differentiating Sunday League journeymen from Champions League superstars. Thankfully, that failing has finally been addressed. It may have a gimmicky, capitalized name, but Player Personality definitely impacts matches.

Round Robben

Thanks to this new feature, certain stars control in a unique fashion that make them instantly recognisable. With a neck the width of a redwood

and the gait of the Terminator crossbred with a gazelle, Ronaldo is an unstoppable force of shoulder-barging nature this year. Indeed, a number of stars rock individual animations that isn't shared with any other player—it only takes the most fleeting of glimpses to pick out the twinkled-toed, ever darting dribbles of Arjen Robben from every other person on the pitch.

Elsewhere, other tweaks prove equally beneficial, even if they don't radically transform how matches play out. First up, the absurdly detailed crowds look fantastic, the plethora of bespoke character models seen during goal celebrations making supporters more credible than ever. Quick Subs are an even shrewder addition to *FIFA*'s side. Rather than having to cumberously dip into pause menus every time you decide to take off a player, a small *RT* icon appears during the second half with suggested substitutions. Simply



Because EA is all about sharing that cross-brand love, NBA Live star James Harden pops up in *The Journey*



RIGHT Hunter appears to be living in Franklin's swanky hillside penthouse from *GTA V*.



→ squeeze down the shoulder button and A, and the game subs out that tired right back or winded midfielder for a suitable replacement—say, intelligently switching out Theo Walcott for Danny Welbeck if you're playing as Arsenal. It's a small quality of life improvement, but still welcome.

Yet despite these winning changes, *FIFA 18* still faces the same overarching problem: This is yet another by-the-numbers update of a series which increasingly feels like it's in stasis. Since the soccer juggernaut first debuted on Xbox One back with 2013's *FIFA 14*, there's been an unshakable sense we're dealing with a franchise that's happy to coast.

Indeed, it's sometimes difficult to tell *FIFA 18* apart from *FIFA 14*, let alone last year's game.

Much of the animation may be sumptuous, the overall presentation impeccable—pre-match commentary and camera angles are so convincing, they feel Sky 'Super Sunday' authentic—but *FIFA*'s core issues remain. Next to *PES*, EA Canada's brand of soccer is annoyingly lightweight. Passing often lacks oomph and shooting continues to feel frustratingly floaty, while the imprecise corner system conveys the sense you're smacking the ball with a golf iron, not an elite athlete's gifted foot. Despite the peerless production

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

The 25th mainline entry in EA's sales-slaying global phenomenon.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

The biggest budget, spared-no-expense soccer title you've ever played.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Premier League fans who want every licensed team, star, and stadium.

values, *FIFA 18* often doesn't feel like a truly convincing representation of soccer when it's in motion.

Head(er) Hunter

Regardless of pitch-side concerns, we can't deny this is a thoroughly exhaustive package that never fails to aim big. Just take the second season of *FIFA*'s single-player campaign—*The Journey: Hunter Returns*. The returning plot-driven mode is well intentioned, weirdly addictive, and genuinely one of the worst written pieces of nonsense we've seen this year.

The shin-scraping cliff notes? You once again play as the mercurial, London-born youngster, Alex Hunter; said talented teen is forced to leave England after a transfer to Real Madrid goes belly up; and thanks to some presumably timely EA commercial deals you end up plying your trade for LA Galaxy in the MLS.

To *The Journey*'s credit, there's some undeniably lovely looking tech bubbling away under its shallow hood. With *FIFA* once again powered by EA's Frostbite engine, the mode's cutscenes look sensational. The various figures Alex encounters during cinematics are so insanely detailed and well-animated—be it estranged parents or cringe-inducing cameos from the likes of Arsenal legend Thierry Henry—they actually outdo the (admittedly, inconsistent)



LEFT We start *The Journey* in shameless style: Losing a game of street soccer to kids.

TOP RIGHT Ronaldo truly is a monster in motion. He's horribly hard to win the ball from.



character models from *Mass Effect: Andromeda*. Considering this is a throwaway eight-hour diversion in a soccer game, and not some sprawling, 40-hour RPG, that's quite the accomplishment.

The big problem with Hunter's soccer saga is that you're given very little control over how events play out. Oh sure, at certain junctures you can choose to give the media either 'fiery' or 'cool' responses in post-match interviews, which subsequently affects Hunter's number of social media followers and relationship with his manager, but big picture choices are kept to a minimum. Case in point, we deliberately score six own-goals over the course of two matches to see if Real Madrid's interest in Hunter will wane. The end result? The move never goes through regardless of how well or poorly you play, because it's predetermined Alex ends up in the MLS. Linearity is no bad thing, but it's the illusion of choice that *The Journey* flirts with, yet ultimately never really follows through on, which grates.

Oh, and the writing is legitimately terrible. We understand EA must have dozens of commercial partners it doesn't want to upset by putting out an overly edgy or esoteric product. But really, the average cutscene exchange in *The Journey* is so explicitly inoffensive and bland, any hint of personality is bulldozed under



STORIES TIME

This year's FUT has a feature which lets you play as different versions of legends. Called Icon Stories, this new addition gives you the chance to play as greats like Ronaldinho or Maradona at different career points. Pick the buck-toothed Brazilian sensation, and you can play as 2002, 2004, and 2010 flavors of the ultimate showboater.

“Doesn’t feel like particularly good value for money if you own last year’s game”

a ton of corporate-friendly BS. Horribly thin character archetypes? Yup. Blatantly obvious product placement? You bet. On-the-nose scripting that makes *Call Of Duty* look like *Casablanca*? You better believe it. But hey, at least mid-match objectives—say, scoring two goals or laying on an assist for a specific teammate—keep the actual on-field action engaging.

Deal-time strategy

Elsewhere, a superficial, but undeniably fun tweak to Career Mode makes chasing the league freshly personable. The new Interactive Transfer Negotiations lend a fun, *Mass Effect*-style slant to buying and selling players. Now, when you try and nab a player from a rival, real-time cutscenes play out, whereby you and the selling club's manager—like a photorealistic Jose Mourinho—barter over transfer fees and sell-on clauses through a dialogue wheel. It's a lovely little feature, which breathes both

personality into the transfer market, and transparency—if your initial bid fails, the other club tells you exactly what figure they're after.

The life-swallowing, occasionally microtransaction-powered, card-collecting FIFA Ultimate Team (FUT) also makes a cup-winning return. This season, there's a fresh emphasis on offline competition, and now you can challenge world-renowned FIFA players' downloaded FUT squads for card pack rewards. To its credit, the Panini-aping mode has never felt less money-driven or cynical.

As a whole though, *FIFA 18* doesn't feel like particularly good value for money if you own last year's game. While the subtle new changes are mostly welcome, this is simply too close a package to *FIFA 17* to make it an instant recommendation. EA's team is still a contender, but years worth of transfer inactivity mean it's automatic lock on the title is long gone. ■



OXM VERDICT

An exhaustive, deliciously detailed footy fest, but one that plays it too safe on the field.



Top tip: Opt for cars as rewards to increase your XP and open up more tiers

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT STUDIOS / DEVELOPER TURN 10 / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST \$59.99

Forza Motorsport 7

REVVED UP AND ON TRACK FOR A PODIUM FINISH PAUL TAYLOR



Turn 10 knows what its audience wants: more of the same, but better. And the studio has largely delivered with *Forza*

Motorsport 7, a showman of a racing game that grabs your attention from the moment your finger squeezes the right trigger.

Nothing comes close to the feel of *Forza*, and on the track it leaves everything else to choke on its cloud of burning rubber. Car handling has been tweaked ever so slightly since 2015's installment. That glorious weight is still there, but feels more responsive than before, feedback through the controller amplified by better, more violent sound design and visuals that communicate the drama of metal-on-metal. Leaning more towards the simulation side than the loose and forgiving arcade, you can really dial it up with a wheel, but no

one else does tactile pad controls like Turn 10.

Windscreen wipers, wings, and rear-view mirrors vibrate at high speed. When it all goes pear-shaped, crashes have the power to shock and clipping a tyre barrier sends stacked treads flying. It can all be undone with the rewind button, though it's worth sticking around until the sound of tinkling glass has faded, and to gawp at the loose panels and worrying dents in your car's bodywork.

After an introduction that will have old hands scrambling to turn off the hand-holding safety assists, it's all go in a campaign that offers more freedom than any other *Motorsport*.

Essentially working as series within a larger series, you're free to choose from a menu of races across different disciplines, and a few showcase events. The showcase events are familiar, tasking you with overtaking a certain number of slower cars,

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

A truly gorgeous racing game.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A big-budget blockbuster with the power to delight, but one that hides as much as it reveals.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Lapsed fans, first and foremost, and the *Forza* hardcore who will swallow the small but sour hindrances.

getting a podium in endurance races and limousine ten-pin bowling. Voice clips from industry personalities and drivers offer some context, but car bowling is just a bit of fun that needs liberal amounts of handbrake.

Dirty fun

Forza Motorsport leaves it up to *Horizon* to hit the dirt and stays firmly on track, bringing back some old favorites from *Forza Motorsport 4*, but still plays with its car selection. Most of the motors fit in thematically, some are outlandish and would make more sense in an open world away from the prescriptive, closed circuits. Still, they're there to drive if you want to set a lap record in the Polaris ATV.

Rewards pile on pretty quickly in the early stages. Races earn credits and XP, showcases gift a car, and you'll have to level up to gain access to new tiers of motors. It's frustrating at first, though after a

“Unequivocally the best-looking racing game you can get for your Xbox right now”

RIGHT A new view tucks you closer to the dash, widens the view and loses the steering wheel.



LEFT You get the largest track selection to date, with old favorites returning. Spa, here, remains a titan.

FAR LEFT Forzavista now extends to the pit lane at the start of a race for you to ogle your car. Those polygons are world-class.

few hours you'll have your fingertips on the top of tiers 4 and 5. However, lots of vehicles are also tucked away in a specialty dealer whose stock rotates every 10 days, timed Forzathon events, and in loot crates. The differing levels of crates also have mod cards (returning from *Forza Motorsport 6*) and gear for your driver, so there's no clear way to know exactly when you're going to get your hands on the beastly '95 Nismo GT-R LM, or spine-breaking Ford RS200. That's three barriers to getting your hands on the machine that you want, rather than simply forking out the required credits.

Focus on the racing, though, and *Forza Motorsport 7* shines—it is unequivocally the best-looking racing game you can get for your Xbox right now. On an Xbox One X, running at 4K, it's sell-your-own-mother material. With a field of 24 cars fighting for position, it's a spectacle.

SHAKE YOUR BONNET

Be brave enough to turn most of the HUD off and you can rely on the sound of the car's engine to tell you when to change gear. Flick the rear-view mirror off, too, and give your screen some room to breathe. Doing this might help with the 'simulation' level of camera shake. There's three settings here—off, normal, and simulation—with the latter sending elements of the HUD wobbling around, and the lean of the car is far more pronounced.

Weather effects will make you dribble. Rain comes on suddenly under darkening skies that flash and rumble with lightning and thunder, and when it all clears up you can practically inhale the petrichor. Fog rolls across the track, diffusing the light, making your headlights work harder, and the new, fictitious Dubai track is one of the series' best.

All weather

However, not every track gets the joy of having its tarmac covered in the wet stuff. Only *Project Cars 2* offers rain, snow and sunshine on all of its circuits, leaving the 30 environments here with largely predetermined seasonal effects. We'd love to see Australia's Bathurst come alive from dawn and sink into the sunset, alas it'll always be dry but overcast on Mount Panorama.

What a year it's been for racing games. There's three of them in

this issue alone, and F1 2017 the issue before, all offering substantial improvements and refinements on what's been before. For anyone who's taken a break from *Forza Motorsport* for a few years will see a game that eclipses all other track races. Long-term fans will see the improvements, but likely feel held back by the perverse reward structure. Sure, frustrations from *Motorsport 6* have been eradicated, but it's a pity they've been replaced by new ones. ■



OXM VERDICT
Putting aside the rewards system snafu, a must-play drop-dead gorgeous racer.

8

PUBLISHER WARNER BROS INTERACTIVE / DEVELOPER MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST \$59.99

Middle-earth: Shadow Of War

A MIGHTY MORDOR SANDBOX SEQUEL TO RULE THEM ALL **DAVE MEIKLEHAM**

Talk about a *Lord Of The Rings* wish fulfillment simulator of the highest order. Talion's open world sequel isn't just an

exhilarating action RPG hybrid, it's the best take on Tolkien's universe to ever grace a game. Patrolling Mordor's skies on a fire-breathing drake. Commanding hundreds of Orcs in epic sieges. Chopping off Uruk-hai heads in the most satisfying third-person scraps since *Arkham Knight*. Licensed games don't get much better (or more barbaric) than this.

Middle-earth: Shadow Of War places you back into the handsome shoes of Talion, who's once again joined by his undead elf chum, Celebrimbor. The pair's bromance is as testy as ever, and the differing ideologies of the uneasy allies creates genuinely interesting moments of tension.

This sequel doesn't just boast

a more satisfying script than its predecessor, it also spins existing *LOTR* lore in unexpected fashion. Example? Talion and Celebrimbor create their own Ring Of Power that matches the finger bling of Sauron as they look to stop the Dark Lord. Oh, and *Return Of The King*'s six-tonne trapdoor spider Shelob is presented in the game as a seductive sorceress, not a cabin-sized bug. *Shadow Of War* still riffs heavily on Peter Jackson's astounding *LOTR* trilogy, but this time around, it also has interesting plot ideas of its own.

As for the actual Orc-garotting gameplay, that remains as strong as ever. *Shadow Of War* isn't just a polished action-adventure, it's a super-ambitious follow-up to a game that already felt pioneering thanks to its innovative Nemesis system. The procedurally-generated enemy feature makes a return in the sequel, and whether you're hunting down or

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

The ambitious sequel to 2014's surprise hit *Shadow Of Mordor*.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A sprawling action-adventure sandbox with epic siege battles.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Those who loves great sandbox systems, or *LOTR* in general.

being ambushed by vengeful Orcs, there's a constant playfulness and personality to proceedings.

Siege phwoar-fare

Nemesis Fortresses are the main headline-hogging new feature in *Shadow Of War*, and they're a tactical treat. When Talion enters any new realm in Middle-earth, his ultimate goal is to capture that region's resident fortress from the local Orc Overlord. To do this, he has to make canny use of his Domination ability: a power that lets him brainwash enemies. Once you've worked the Ranger's brain-bending voodoo on foes, you can then order them to go undercover to infiltrate the Overlord's ranks or send them on assassination missions to try and take out his best Warchiefs or Captains. It's a welcome evolution to the Nemesis system, one that ensures Talion can delegate a lot of Uruk-hai hunting out to his

“Work has clearly gone into making traversal as empowering as possible”

RIGHT The game is capable of displaying huge amount of on-screen enemies at once.



FAR LEFT You can eventually mount and fly these mighty fire-breathing bastards.

LEFT Storming a Nemesis Fortress with an army at your back feels absurdly badass.

brainwashed subordinates.

When you’ve weakened an Overlord’s ranks, it’s time to take his Fortress. The resulting scraps court the spectacle of the movies’ best battles, and seeing hundreds of Orcs, Uruks and Olog-hai (a sort of pumped up, extra fighty Cave Troll) storm one of these structures is exhilarating.

Can you still capture a fortress without all the enjoyable busywork? Sure. But failing to take down an Overlord’s underlings before waging your siege means the defenses are a lot tougher to break down—fail to knock off a particular Warchief, and you may be hit by projectiles from his Graug siege beasts on the ramparts. The actual mechanics that go into taking a Nemesis Fortress really only involve standing in and capturing three zones, then confronting the Overlord in a boss fight. Still, the overall large-scale warfare is so convincing, you won’t care you’re

MAPPING IT OUT

Shadow Of War’s map is a lot more varied than its predecessor. Not only can you bask in the iconic, extra evil sights of Minas Morgul and Mount Doom, but there are a host of unique locations the films never touch. Sun-dappled forests hide unique Ent-like abominations, while the chilly Seregoth is an Orc-brutalizing winter wonderland. Compared to the overly grey *Shadow Of Mordor*, this variety is hugely refreshing.

just playing a glorified capture-the-flag mode.

Parkour life

Elsewhere, work has clearly gone into making traversal as empowering as possible. With the exception of 2014’s wonderfully nimble *Sunset Overdrive*, there are few games that can match Talion’s fleet-footed parkour. The Ranger’s Elven Agility perk lets him scurry up lofty towers in no time with well-timed jabs of A, while Shadow Strider lets Talion break out a double jump that carries him hundreds of feet through the air. He’s Middle-earth’s answer to Spider-Man, and controlling him is a pleasure.

The only real criticism of *Shadow Of War*? It plays things safe, adhering to open-world tropes at every turn. As such, you’ll find scalable towers that unlock side missions, enemy outposts to clear out, armor and weapons to upgrade, and artifacts

to find. None of this is original, but when the core gameplay loops of sneaking, climbing and combat are so satisfying, it’s hard to grumble.

Shadow Of War is a profoundly satisfying sequel, one that serves up sweeping battles across a far more visually varied map than its predecessor. Talion’s epic open world isn’t just among 2017’s top titles, it’s one of the best licensed games ever to appear on Xbox. ■



OXM VERDICT

An exhilarating open world, and one of the best sequels to appear on Xbox One.

9

PUBLISHER BETHESDA / DEVELOPER ARKANE / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST \$29.99

Dishonored: Death Of The Outsider

GOD ONLY KNOWS WHAT I'D BE WITHOUT YOU LEON HURLEY



It almost seems too soon for a new *Dishonored* so close to the last game. But there's no need to worry with *Death*

Of The Outsider, as the pace, design, and tone all make it feel like a great standalone epilogue to the story so far—satisfying in size and challenge, without feeling too large or daunting to dive back in.

There's a beautifully balanced economy to its design overall, creating a smaller, more focused game that never feels like it's shortchanging you. Levels are more compact, and paths more pared back, but there are new side mission contracts to occupy you. There are plenty of little moments and incidental background stories to discover and, while it might only take you 10 or so hours to complete it, everything combines to create a mini-*Dishonored* experience

that can sit happily alongside the two games to date.

Playing as Billie Lurk, Daud's former right-hand woman, the title pretty much says it all. She sets off to kill the series' interfering god for... reasons. It wouldn't be a *Dishonored* game without cool powers and Billie's bag of tricks, while limited to three magical abilities (and some cool toys), are so well balanced and rewarding to use that you don't even miss having any more. All the *Dishonored* games end up revolving around two or three core abilities, with some fun options on the side, and this just dials into the essentials.

Of those, Displace is your main go-to. It's like a time-delayed teleport, letting you place a marker and jump to it when triggered. While it has the obvious use of hopping around the level in an instant, the ability to trigger it later means you can use it as a quick tactical getaway—leaving

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

An FPS stealth-em-up with magical abilities in a fantasy 18th century world.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Full of freedom and opportunities, it's about making plans and seeing them through.

WHO'S IT FOR?

People who like games with a little more freedom and chances to experiment.

a ghostly Billie outline somewhere safe so you can nip in and steal/kill something then wink back before anyone notices.

Scouts' honor

Then there's Foresight, an astral projection-like power that lets you float around a level scouting it out and tagging enemies and objects of interest. Where things get really interesting is that you can use this to drop a Displace marker somewhere you couldn't otherwise reach, that Billie can then use as long as there's still line of sight. Comboed together, these abilities can peel open a level and turn it into a playground.

There's one other power called Semblance that lets you create a magical disguise, sucking the face off of guards with void energy to mesmerize your way past checkpoints. It lacks any interplay with the other two powers, but can be a godsend

“It wants you to have fun while still giving you a Dishonored experience”

RIGHT Displace's time delayed teleport is all about jumping to hard-to-reach areas of getting out of trouble quickly if things go wrong.



FAR LEFT Billie has plenty of new gadgets, like the Hyperbaric Grenade which, despite what this looks like, is non-lethal. Promise.

LEFT The Foresight power not only lets you scout out areas, but also mark enemies and shows where they're going to go in the future.

when you can't see a good route past a problem, or just want to save time.

While three powers might sound light it's perfectly balanced with the scale of the game overall. Levels here are smaller and more compact, but no less fun to explore and perfect—there are options you'll sometimes only see on the way back out, or moments of clarity when you realize you've been missing a thing staring you in the face. It's just that here, those journeys will take, say, an evening a level, as to the previous games where you could spend a week on one stretch of street.

It's a game that feels like it wants you to have fun while still giving you a *Dishonored* experience. Lots of little touches help that along. Like the fact that your magic just recharges now, without pickups, meaning you can just murderously teleport all over the place. There's little in the way of upgrades either, only bone

WHICH BILLIE LURK?

There's been several possible fates for Lurk in *Dishonored*. In the Knife Of Dunwall's DLC for *Dishonored 1* she was Daud's second in command. In *Dishonored 2* a low chaos ending will see Meagan Foster reveal herself to be Billie. Except that if you play a time traveling mission a certain way, the events in the past can change so she never loses any of her body parts. *Death Of The Outsider* make it pretty clear which options Arkane consider canon.

charms you can seek out and use to fine tune abilities. Chaos options are dropped too, leaving it up to your own conscience whether to kill, spare or save various guards and NPCs.

Twice the fun

But while a light, fun playthrough of *Death Of The Outsider* might not take you long you could easily double that 10 or so hours experimenting, looking for all the bone charms or perfecting some of the contracts. They can vary from simple additional assassinations or thefts to a couple of jobs that are almost entirely separate missions in their own right.

If there's any downside to the smaller size it's that the story occasionally struggles to justify a few things. A few important beats are shoehorned in because the game needs them to happen, while the plot is very tightly wrapped around McGuffin collecting. There's also a

few jumps needed to get to the end, which is a little rushed.

But by that point the story reaches a definitive momentum that's hard to fight. Overall, while the economy is clear to see in the design and structure to make a smaller game more cheaply and quickly, it's still beautifully crafted and always enjoyable. It's also, as that name suggests, quite the full stop in the story so far and an ending that gives the series a fitting send off. ■



OXM VERDICT

An enjoyable smaller-scale conclusion to the *Dishonored* series so far.



Marvel Vs Capcom: Infinite

LET'S CALL IT A DRAW **DOM PEPIATT**

Despite some deep and satisfying new mechanics, *Marvel Vs Capcom: Infinite* is a hard game to love.

Granted, it brings in some versatile and progressive new options for you to use in fights, but presentation and production values of the game leave a lot to be desired—especially when held up against past entries in the franchise.

It's clear off the bat that *Marvel Vs Capcom: Infinite* is riding on the coattails of the series: It cuts and pastes characters almost entirely wholesale from the previous game, using the same animations and moves in this generation's first Capcom crossover fighter. That in itself isn't a problem—many fighting games feature returning characters—but when you examine how little else is new in the game, it does feel like you're getting a little short-changed.

The game itself feels unfinished. It feels cheap. The UI and the graphical polish of the game make it feel pretty low-budget, and the character models and animations all feel like they take way too many shortcuts. This rarely affects the gameplay—which, in all honestly, is usually tight and responsive—but it's hard not to notice that some super attacks won't hit where you think thanks to dodgy hitboxes and animations not matching up with frame data.

Offsetting these complaints are the new mechanics—Active Switch and the Infinity Stones. Active Switch gives you the freedom to play intricate mind

RIGHT Despite some poorly-done character models, you can always tell who's who in the game, and everyone rocks their signature look, too.

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

A crossover fighter featuring the biggest names from Capcom and Marvel (minus Deadpool and the X-Men).

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Street Fighter's hyperactive little cousin: It's noisy, boisterous and there's often a million things going on on-screen at once.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Lovers of the Marvel Cinematic Universe will feel at home here, as will genre fans of fighting games.



“It looks a bit naff but there's depth, complexity, and variation here”

games with your opponent by bringing in your partner at *any time* in a fight to interrupt combos, add more elements to your own moves, or just pile on the pressure. It adds a lot more flexibility to the fighting series.

Then there's the Infinity Stones—six variable abilities that can complement a character's moveset. One allows a character to gain a projectile, while another guarantees a rebound hit—thinking about how these work with traditional fighting game gimmicks adds a whole new layer of depth to the game that can make battles unpredictable and tense. Think about a typical contact bruiser like Haggar with a teleport ability—it redefines every fighting game classification and gives you a *lot* more to learn as a result.

Grip it up

Luckily, the game comes with an in-depth Mission Mode that will help you get to grips with most of the mechanics, though it'll never teach you how to make the most of the Stones or Active Switch. It's beginner-

friendly, though, and even has button-mashing friendly mechanics like Auto Combo and Easy Supers to lower the barrier of entry for new players.

There's also a camp, high-drama single-player mode on offer, too, but we'd recommend avoiding the game if that's your sole attraction—Marvel characters lack charm and the Capcom characters often feel under-developed or lost. The campaign's short, it's pretty badly presented, and despite some exemplary fan-service, it's just a bit rubbish (except for when you're actually fighting).

That kind of sums up *Marvel Vs Capcom: Infinite*, really—it looks a bit naff, and it's presented poorly, but underneath the unattractive exterior there's a game that really excels as a 2v2 fighter. There's depth, complexity, and variation inside this ugly duckling, and if you're a fighting game fan after an explosive, bombastic experience you could definitely do worse. ■



OXM VERDICT

Poor production values pleasantly offset by a fresh, deep combat system.

7



PUBLISHER DEVOLVER DIGITAL / DEVELOPER REIKON GAMES / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST \$19.99

Ruiner

GO GET 'EM, PUPPY MARTIN KITTS

In a grimy sci-fi dystopia, populated by synthetically enhanced citizens and ruled over by the shady Heaven

corporation, a hacker jacks into your augmented brain and reprograms you with a single directive: Kill Boss.

What ensues is around 10 hours of crimson-tinted neon carnage, as you take on room after dimly-lit room of increasingly well-armed bad guys and bullet-spraying bosses. Although it initially appears to be a standard sort of twin stick shooter, there's more to the combat than meets the eye. A lot depends on which abilities you decide to focus on in the skill tree.

After much failure, we came to the conclusion that *Ruiner* is effectively a melee game first and a twin stick shooter a distant second. The small enemy hitboxes and slow projectiles make it hard to hit a moving target with the basic pistol, and while weapons such as the shotgun are reasonably efficient at keeping the bad guys at bay, they're not always available when you need them and ammo is limited.

Bludgeoning enemies with a chunk of drainpipe, however, is quicker and easier. You can grab swords that deal a bit more damage but they soon break, leaving you with the default blunt instrument, which does the job as well as anything else. There's actually some subtle encouragement not to bother picking up weapons at all, in the form of a weapon grinder that chews up any unused items

RIGHT And you will know me by the trail of dead.

BELOW Mini bosses have similar abilities to you, but much bigger health bars.

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

A twin stick shooter where shooting might not always be the most effective tactic.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A bit of bullet hell and some anime-influenced slow-motion swordplay.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Fans of *Furi* and *Hotline Miami* are probably going to enjoy this.



"A lot depends on which abilities you decide to focus on in the skill tree"

at the end of a battle and spits out karma points which can be used to buy more useful upgrades.

Chaaaarge!

Charging directly towards a group of gun-toting opponents is a dumb tactic, of course, and you can go from max health to zero in an instant. There are a few tools available to help you close the gap between ranged enemies and the business end of your iron bar, the most effective of which seems to be the basic dash move. Upgrading this makes you take less damage while dashing, and can be combined with a slow motion power that lets you zip around at full speed while enemies swim through treacle.

There's also an energy shield to help you break through tightly packed defenses, and any upgrades that increase your durability are sensible investments, particularly during boss fights. On the other hand, the ability to set waypoints for a multi-stage dash is one that looks cool, but seems too fiddly to be of

much use in the heat of battle, and a few of the later skills also appear somewhat redundant. Still, you're not penalized for trying them out, as you can always deactivate the useless ones and get your unlock points refunded. Experimenting with different combinations may well reveal something that better suits your own playing style.

When it works well, it's fast, brutal and satisfying. Dodging bullets, dashing between enemies and leaving behind piles of bodies: These are good things. But it also falls flat in some areas. It can be hard to see bullets, you'll often die without knowing what hit you, and it would definitely benefit from a smoother framerate. There's nothing quite like it on Xbox, though, and the option to experimentally re-spec your character at any point during a level is a great idea and the key to getting the best out of *Ruiner*. ■



XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

Difficult, hectic and ultimately rewarding. Thumping soundtrack, too.

7





PUBLISHER STUDIOMDHR ENTERTAINMENT / DEVELOPER STUDIOMDHR ENTERTAINMENT / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST \$19.99

Cuphead

THY CUP RUNNETH OVER **DOM PEPIATT**

074

Cuphead treads that fine line between being hard and being fun. Every boss seems almost impossible on the

first try, but as you progress you start to chisel away at each phase, and you begin to understand how to win. The game is a constant dance between you and the developers; for every step you take forwards, they shove you one back.

The result is a game that's never frustrating—not really. You can retry the same boss 50 times, but you never get irritated, because you know, really, it's your fault if you fail. The game never deceives you, it never tricks you: Every attack pattern is laid out for you to see, you've just got to have the reactions, patience, and skill to deal with it. *Cuphead* handles perfectly: Every input performs on-screen, and there is never a frustration with the mechanics.

Maybe that's because the enemies don't have healthbars, so maybe

in your head you think you're doing better every time until you die and the progress bar shows you how far you got... either way, it's a great psychological trick that really doubles down on the 'just one more go' psychology of gaming.

Finger mouse

Cuphead himself is a china cup-headed character (surprisingly) with the body of Mickey Mouse who shoots projectiles from his fingers. His mission is simple: Retrieve the souls of a series of minions across three islands and return them to the devil. The structure is simple, and the progression is addictive—simply clear an island to head to the next one. Anyone that's picked up a platformer before will know how to progress.

But *Cuphead's* appeal is deeper than most platformers. The game fits awkwardly between run and gun, bullet hell, and platformer—it's none of the above, really, but at the same time it's all of them. At its weakest, *Cuphead* is a good run and gun

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

A hand-drawn boss rush platformer with a Dixieland jazz soundtrack and killer mechanics.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

You're inevitably going to hear people call it 'the Dark Souls of 2D games', for better or worse.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Fans of tough games are going to get on with this, as are animation nuts and art fans.

platformer with erratic enemy patterns set against a backdrop of wonderful, Disney-inspired environments.

At its best, *Cuphead* is simply the best 2D action game on Xbox One. The platformer levels are clearly an afterthought—they're fun, but the boss fights themselves show the game's original vision: Every object shot by every boss is lovingly designed, the game design perfectly complements its overall aesthetic, and once you learn to read the game's very specific visual language, you understand that this game *does* want you to succeed... eventually.

The detached surrealism of the whole game escalates as you progress—the first island is a few run and guns interspersed with boss battles and the occasional bonus level, too. But each island adds a new kind of level, ending up in some set-piece boss battles that are frankly some of the best boss battles we've played in gaming: One sees you travel through the various stages of a play as the lead actress waits on

The developers' plan was to surpass the Guinness World Record for the number of boss battles in a run and gun game



LEFT You wouldn't think a game with so many bosses would have as much variation as *Cuphead*, but no encounter feels like it's retreading old ground.

FAR LEFT No matter how many times you play, you'll notice new details.

RIGHT Finding it tough? Drop the level to Regular—but this won't unlock the ending.

"The detached surrealism of the whole game escalates as you progress"

you, using props from each scene as special moves, changing up the attack pattern, and keeping you on your toes. Another sees you changing the rails of a ghost train as you head deeper into the trolley's path... the creativity of the game extends beyond its wonderful hand-drawn art, right into the depths of its game design, and it's spectacular.

Do be a quitter

Thing is, if you are struggling with a boss—take the living kettle full of fish, for example—you can either quit out and try another one of the bosses on your current island, or you could go back to the shop and purchase different items. Some projectiles act like a shotgun—better damage at short range—while others act like seeker projectiles. You can also add charms—an extra bar of health, or a dash that makes you invulnerable. Some bosses will require you to experiment a bit, and knowing there are a series of variables to experiment with is another way of keeping you

GET THE REFERENCE?

Cuphead is full of some gentle references that may well go right over your head, but for every one you spot, the game just feels even smarter. From the *Final Fantasy VII*-inspired title screen to the one-eyed pig merchant inspired by animation legend Tex Avery, the game keeps throwing subtle hints about its inspirations at you. You might see Woody Woodpecker in the enemies that burrow down from trees to drill on you, or you might see Betty Boop in the angry mermaid/ Medusa that you'll fight later on. Animation fans will eat it up.



invested, keeping your head in the game in spite of its difficulty.

We will say this: Alter the game's default controls. The initial setup puts practically everything important (Super move, dash, shoot, and jump) all on the face buttons—so unless you enjoy playing with a claw, you'll want to re-map some elements of the control to the shoulder buttons. There are some projectile spawn points in scrolling levels that seem to be completely random, and thanks to the emergent nature of the scripting, it *can* feel a bit unfair. This happens maybe 1 percent of the time, though, and can be totally forgiven if you learn how to minimize your scrolling-level aircraft well enough.

Cuphead is a game that's going to take you on an emotional journey—and not because of its simple storyline. You'll find a boss, you'll hate

the boss, you'll learn to understand the boss... and then you'll kill the boss. You'll be elated, your body will feel light, your aching fingers will rejoice... and then you'll need to do it all again. That's the beautiful rhythm of *Cuphead*, the wonderful rollercoaster every single level takes you on to form that delicious love/hate relationship you only get with a game once in a blue moon. ■



OXM VERDICT

A jaw-dropping example of game design and artistry, perfectly entwined.

9

Tom Brady has five Super Bowl rings, yet this is his first ever *Madden* cover

PUBLISHER EA / DEVELOPER EA TIBURON / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST \$59.99

Madden NFL 18

A LONGSHOT FOR THE HALL OF FAME BEN WILSON



How does one of the most fabled names in sports gaming offer up its most original mode in more than a decade,

yet still fall short of a big, *big score*? Excellent question. More than likely it's a matter of resource: Presumably, so much development time and effort was required for *Madden 18*'s Longshot story mode, exhaustive changes elsewhere simply weren't possible. The end result, then, is a package that is simultaneously a triumph and a disappointment.

Let's address the triumphant element first. Longshot is—what's the most scientific way of putting this?—abso-bloody-lutely chuffing brilliant. It's a cinematic story mode that some lazily labelled as an oval-ball version of FIFA's *The Journey*, when in fact it plays more

like a Telltale adventure. You control college quarterback prospect Devin Wade as he attempts one final shot at an NFL career, and his interactions with best pal Colt Cruise throw up not only nicely judged conversation choices, but completely unexpected, yet contextually welcome, QTEs too. I've played *Madden* games for 25 years, yet never before considered that literally steering a ball, in slow motion, close-up, into a receiver's hands could be a) feasible and b) wonderfully satisfying.

The extra Miley

You spend very little time in the mode playing actual pads-on football. Instead, it throws up pleasant surprises, including a laugh-out-loud early moment where Miley Cyrus' 'The Climb' comes on the boys' car radio, and you get to choose whether to sing along or change station. An X

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

The biggest football game going, with added Frostbite engine and new story mode.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Last year's game. This feels a lot like *Madden 17.5*, rather than a fully fledged sequel.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Patriots diehards, natch, but *Friday Night Lights* viewers will adore Longshot.

Factor-style TV show appearance delivers one of the series' most fun mini-games ever, while 7-on-7 action featuring army players is so great you instantly want it to be fleshed out into its own bespoke mode.

Wade and Cruise's chemistry carries the tale and the feels-tugging parts all pay off tidily at the story's conclusion. But it's not only the end result that may break your heart. So, too, will the realization that the mode is done at the sub-six-hour mark. And in a game which you'd hope to keep you occupied for 200-hours-plus over the next 12 months, that's a heavy blow. You might play it through a second time to glimpse another of its multiple endings, but three times, four? There's more chance of the Cleveland Browns winning this year's Super Bowl.

Your other 194-hours-or-so, then, are likely to be split across Franchise

“You spend very little time in the mode playing actual pads-on football”

RIGHT Peer beneath the helmets and you'll see likenesses, such as Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers, are exceptional.



FAR LEFT This year's tutorial is a Super Bowl rematch between Atlanta and New England. Hey, your playcalling can't be worse than Kyle Shanahan's.

LEFT Oscar winner Mahershala Ali is perfectly cast as Devin Wade's father, with JR Lemon (Wade) and Scott Porter (Colt Cruise) also on top form.

and Ultimate Team. Both are good but neither show enough advancement from *Madden 17* to justify the \$60 price tag on their own. Franchise, for instance, upgrades last year's new draft board in order to better track each year's crop of future prospects, and features more realistic injury occurrences: Both smart tweaks, sure, but insufficient to truly overhaul a mode that's needed rebooting since the 2013 switch to Xbox One.

Size matters

Ultimate Team, meanwhile, suffers from NFL roster sizes; while in *FIFA* you're building a team of 11 plus a few key reserves, with every position vital, it's tough to work up excitement when saving coins for a new left guard or strong safety. (Though it must be said that packing a Tom Brady or Drew Brees here is every bit as exciting as a Ronaldo or Messi in

FROSTY CONDITIONS

This is *Madden's* first year in the Frostbite engine, but it has little tangible effect on the feel of standard matches. Stadium lighting is more authentic, sure, and body types are more human, but for now its influence is purely visual. At least that's the case on the field; it's the implementation of Frostbite which drove the team to create Longshot, and dev EA Tiburon is insistent that it couldn't have been done without it.

its kick-a-ball stablemate.) *Madden Squads* is a nice way of mixing up the Ultimate Team action, enabling you to combine your team with those of two mates, but again it makes for a few-hours dalliance rather than everlasting intertwinement.

Helpful, then, that the fundamentals out on the field really are at the top of their game. The ability to elect between three match styles—arcade, sim, and competitive—means even strangers to the sport, perhaps tempted by Longshot, can still find their way; while the serious sim players rejoice in minor-but-key improvements to rushing options and line-of-scrimmage interactions between wide receivers and cornerbacks. If you're the type of fan seeking true goal-line fades, deep passes after looking off a safety, and proper run-blocking assignments, there's much to trigger

over-elaborate end-zone dances in front of the sofa.

Even if you're not: Again, you *have* to play Longshot. While *Madden's* year-on-year transformation on the whole underwhelms, there's no question that its new marquee mode is a resounding success. Play it, enjoy it, and ponder just how great *Madden 19* might be, if the brothers Wade-Cruise are given unlimited access to a complete NFL career. ■



OXM VERDICT

Excellent on the field, but lack of depth off it hampers Lombardi Trophy hopes.

8

SUBSCRIBE TO



CHOOSE YOUR PACKAGE

PRINT

Every issue delivered to your door

ONLY \$30
SAVING 74%



DIGITAL

Including image galleries on iPad

ONLY \$20
SAVING 83%



PRINT+DIGITAL

Every issue delivered in print and to your iOS and Android devices

ONLY \$45 SAVING 81%



VISIT myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/sub0XM

OR

CALL 844-779-2822

Mon-Fri 8am to 7pm
and Sat 10am - 2pm EDT

TERMS & CONDITIONS Prices and savings quoted are compared to buying full priced print and digital issues. You will receive 13 issues in a year. You can write to us or call us to cancel your subscription within 14 days of purchase. Your subscription is for the minimum term specified and will expire at the end of the current term. Payment is non-refundable after the 14 day cancellation period unless exceptional circumstances apply. Your statutory rights are not affected. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. For full terms and conditions please visit <http://myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/terms>. Offer ends 30 November 2017.



NEXT MONTH

PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS

WE SPEAK TO BLUEHOLE ABOUT THE BIGGEST GAME OF 2017,
AND ASK HOW IT WILL PLAY ON XBOX ONE X

ON SALE **DECEMBER 12**

SEE PAGE OPPOSITE TO SUBSCRIBE NOW

*Contents subject to change. Please don't get angry if they do.

079

ALSO
**MASSIVE
REVIEWS
SPECIAL!**

OXM'S VERDICT ON
ASSASSIN'S CREED
ORIGINS, COD: WWII,
WOLFENSTEIN II,
AND MORE!





extra

Get more from your Xbox





Sometimes you'll have a game that you just can't stop playing. Years will pass, and yet you'll find yourself repeatedly drawn into a particular world. For some it'll be something like the endless possibilities of *Minecraft*, but for others... well, let's just say some people don't deserve nice things. We've been playing **Grand Theft Auto V: Online** (p82), and we don't like to play nicely with others. Elsewhere, with all of the nightmares from *The Evil Within 2*, we decided to take a look back at the survival horror classic that is **Resident Evil 4** (p86). We explore just what made this entry in the series so iconic, and why so many games are still trying to borrow from it. Just don't forget to pack some green herbs when you go to read it. Next is a different kind of scarefest, thanks to a run-in with some truly testing boss battles in **Metal Gear Solid V** (p90). Sorry Kojima, but we can't love everything all of the time, so we've had to have a really good rant about it. There's time for last fright though, with a list of the **Top 10 Scariest Enemies in Xbox History** (p92) that lets us celebrate all of the fiends, foes, and former friends we've made over the past few years, and talk about just why they freak us out so much. Don't worry, you're safe, there aren't any clowns in it. Well, not unless you count the one that's standing just behind your left shoulder...



082



086



090



092

081



Keep an eye out for this badge over the next few pages: It indicates when a game of old can be booted up in shiny Xbox One-o-vision.

→ CHECK OUT OUR VAST LIBRARY OF XBOX FEATURES AT WWW.GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM



It's too tempting to resist being antisocial in **Grand Theft Auto V.** So why even try? **SAMUEL ROBERTS**

PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES / **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** NOVEMBER 2014



GTA Online's recent Smuggler's Run expansion brings a host of new air-themed missions to Rockstar's seemingly

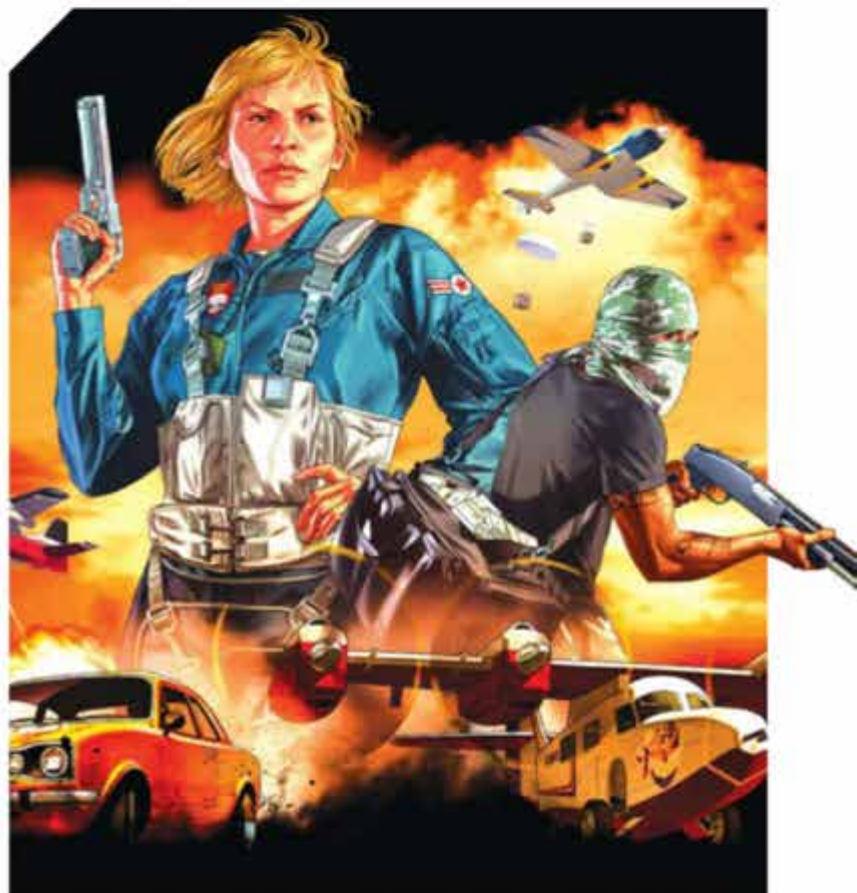
everlasting open-world smash. As suggested by the name, you build up a smuggling empire, which you start off by buying a hangar either in Los Santos airport, or even better, the military base of Fort Zancudo. The latter is a particularly exciting choice, since before now, lingering in Zancudo for any longer than 20 seconds usually ended with a bullet to the head, or your stolen military aircraft being shot down with rockets. Now, it's the home of my jet-powered criminal empire. Well, I say 'empire'. It's really more of an opportunity for me to admire my collection of airplanes like a friendless millionaire.

Zancudo is a novel location to set up shop in *Smuggler's Run*. For players who have driven across *GTA V's* lovely map as much as I have, this is the most unknowable location remaining, thanks to its previously aggressive security forces. Now, though, I can waltz in through the front gate on my motorbike that looks like it was made exclusively for sad dads, and the army guys just let me drive right past, rather than hunting me down like I just pissed on their fries. It cost a lot of in-game dollars for the privilege, but it was worth it for a few reasons.

Aside from the neat surroundings, you see, owning a hangar in Zancudo also lets you steal airplanes from the military without getting the attention of the police. So rather than having to save up and buy a Hydra jet from in-game shop Warstock, you can pop outside at any time and steal the similarly-good Lazer, which is a massive bonus.

Diary of a dick

This isn't necessarily great news for other players, though. I have a confession: I've gradually turned into a dick in *GTA Online*. Not a full-on



menace who goes out to grief other players, you understand, but as I've amassed fun toys like my rocket-equipped buzzard chopper and my HVY Nightmask jeep (which has front-mounted machine guns) I've gradually been using them to spoil other people's good times. I'll turn up, let off a few rockets or try to blow up someone's car, then flee before my own self-esteem can be brought down a peg.

Why am I doing this, when I hate other players who do this to me? Well, rather than take responsibility and chalk it up to an obvious personality problem, I'm going to go ahead and blame this on ennui towards modern life and a lingering sense of political uncertainty. Yeah, that'll do. The other

thing is, this kind of chaos and player-created interruption is the essence of *GTA Online*, to some degree. These vehicles are sold with attached weapons for a reason, and *GTA's* rarely been about politeness towards your fellow man. I don't feel good about myself when I fly my Lazer over a highway and send a couple of rockets exploding into another player's car, but I do feel *something*.

Recent events have challenged my growing sense of immorality, though. *GTA's* business activities are the way to make big money in the game, and they require completing a bunch of supply missions before traveling across the map to deliver them on a public server. This means other players can interrupt the journey if you're unlucky,



as your supplies pop up on the map for everyone to see. Including me.

Angel from above

I join a server and leave my hangar. I jump into a Lazer and take off, my intention being to parachute onto the city's pier and wander around for no real reason. On the way, though, a red icon pops up on the map, showing that a supply mission is taking place on a nearby hilly road. If I kill these guys, there could be a fair bit of cash up for grabs, and if nothing else, it will annoy them, which is apparently what I enjoy doing these days. I fly over, and police are swarming the two vehicles performing the deliveries. Hoping to hit the players, I let off a few rockets, and accidentally bring down two of the three helicopters unloading machine gun fire upon them. Ah well, I'll try again. I come in for another pass, this time sending rockets towards the cars in the midst of the chase. Unfortunately, the rockets home in on the police cars instead, clearing a path for the delivery. This is not going well.

Another pass: More cop cars blow up, while the human players remain unscathed. What the hell? I turn the Lazer's homing function off, and

"I will continue down the road of bad behavior and ignore their friendly gesture"

freefire rockets at them instead, but again I narrowly miss, and hit another cop car. By the time I turn for another pass, they've reached their destination and the supplies are lost forever. You can picture what I did there, reader. I didn't troll them: I inadvertently helped them finish the mission. Annoyingly, there's now a slightly warm feeling building within me that's the result of being nice to someone in an online game. How awful.

Then a notification pops up: The players who I just helped invite me to join their motorcycle club. I'm slightly moved. They think I'm a good man, and they want to reward my selfless protection services with an outreach of friendship in this cold world of online, never knowing the truth that I wanted to murder them and steal their stuff just for a laugh. I could pretend that I am the person they believe me to be, and put myself back on a righteous

path in *GTA Online*. Well, as righteous as you can get in a game where can shoot fireworks at pedestrians for fun.

I'm not that guy, though. I will continue down the road of bad behavior and ignore their friendly gesture, vanishing towards the coast in my Lazer, before accidentally crashing it into a building. I'm running with scissors in *GTA Online*, and that's just the way it's going to be. I didn't choose the dick life—the dick life chose me. ■

ABOVE Not a car that should be scratched—but it will be.

BELOW Buying a hangar isn't cheap, particularly in Fort Zancudo, but it's a pretty way to store your airplanes in *GTA Online*.

WHAT IS IT?

GTA Online is the ever-expanding multiplayer portion of *GTA V*, and has kept the game selling ridiculous numbers for over four years.



083

→ PLAYED ANYTHING GOOD RECENTLY? COME SHARE IT AT WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/OXMUK



Anything can happen in **Formula One**, as a wise man once said, and it usually does **PHIL IWANLUK**

PUBLISHER CODEMASTERS / DEVELOPER CODEMASTERS / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE AUGUST 2017



For years now, the Codemasters *Formula One* games have let the player begin their career in any car they like, and for years

I've donned the caps of the sport's slowest teams. That says a lot about what I want out of the game: a rags to riches story told in plucky points-paying positions and an eventual contract signing to a championship-winning team, rewarding my hard graft and obvious prodigious talent. This year I signed for Toro Rosso, the Red Bull feeder team who were once Italian minnows Minardi, and have a single victory (Vettel's 2008 wet Monza drive) to their name.

Except, there's a bit of a problem. In their continuing efforts to add depth and authenticity to the game's flagship career mode, the Codemasters devs have made my favored path to ascendancy particularly difficult this year. And by particularly difficult, I mean I've bellowed in impotent rage at Chris the R&D guy, my condescending agent, and Romain Grosjean multiple times, and I'm only a few races in.

The first problem—and this is a strength of the game, really—is that my Toro Rosso's internal parts appear to be made from eggshells, ice sculptures, and those Samsung Galaxy Note 7s that kept catching fire. After three rigorous practice sessions, my various engine parts are already showing serious wear, and by qualifying my race engineer is warning me not to drive over apexes or shift gears too many times in case something busts. Nursing my car through Melbourne's 13 turns like a Fabergé egg courier on a unicycle, I manage a respectable midfield qualifying position.

Then two laps into the race, I lose fourth gear. Grosjean and his Haas smell blood behind me, and he's soon within DRS range and



"My internal parts appear to be made from eggshells and ice structures"

lunging down the straights, drawing level in the braking zones. Taking some creative lines and testing the definition of sportsmanlike behavior, I

manage to stay ahead, but now there's an embarrassing line of five cars forming behind me. By the time we've all made our pit stops all five of them have got ahead of me. I take the chequered flag, dejected and without any points at all.

Drive angry

And that's all fun and games, until Chris the R&D guy sits me down before practice 1 at China two weeks later to tell me the reliability upgrade I spent 1,000 points on has failed. Do you know how hard I worked for those 1,000 points, Chris? Do you? I decide to channel my anger into my driving and once again put in a decent quali performance, this time on all-new engine and gearbox

parts. The next day, something extraordinary happens at the Shanghai International Circuit. A race that begins wet but which dries out around halfway through offers a tempting tyre gamble. The race engineer is on the blower asking if I want to come in for ultra soft dry tyres now, before anyone else has dared to try it. In P13 and with nothing to lose but the sight of Nico Hulkenberg's rear wing, I go for it.

No one else pits in for three more laps, most waiting even longer. When they do go in to change to dry tyres, I inherit the race lead by default. And then... no one comes and takes it back from me. Not Vettel or Raikkonen in their charging Ferraris, nor the Mercs. And certainly not Grosjean. Somehow I become Toro Rosso's second ever race winner just like that. Just as well too, because after my engine blows up the following race in Bahrain, I'm almost ready to hand in my notice. ■

WHAT IS IT?

The officially licensed videogame of motorsport's travelling circus of tedium, *Formula One*. There are classic cars this year.





I went back to **Star Wars Battlefront**—turns out it hasn't aged too well **STEPHEN ASHBY**

PUBLISHER EA / DEVELOPER DICE / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE NOVEMBER 17 2015



When I visited DICE's Stockholm offices early in 2015, they didn't really want to talk about the fact that they had skipped out on adding

a dedicated single-player mode to *Battlefront*, or that proper space battles were missing. I suspect they had been getting the same questions over and over again all day, and the answers were well rehearsed, talking about the clear vision they had for the game from the start of development.

But then came the DLC. Guess what? *Frickin' space battles*. The addition of a Death Star section meant that not only were you dogfighting with TIE fighters, you were also completing the trench run on the surface of the Death Star. Yes, that *does* sound awesome.

Seeing as I had ducked out of multiplayer long before this DLC landed, I grabbed the season pass this month, and then learned to waterski, wrote two short novels, and watched all eight *Star Wars* movies while I waited for the game and its 22GB update to reinstall. Finally, I was ready to take on the Empire.

Storms overhead

I jumped straight into a Battle Station match, and (obviously) chose an X-wing for the opening battle. The interface has changed a little since I last played, but shooting is shooting, even in a galaxy far, far away. Fairly quickly I was bulls-eying TIEs and focusing my fire on the Star Destroyer's shield generators. The flying was always a highlight in the game, and it felt great to be dodging asteroids.

Soon enough us rebels had disabled the Destroyer, and after a distractingly long loading screen, I was suddenly dressed in blue and wearing one of those white plastic helmets that looks like half an egg and seems to serve no purpose at all.



"I came away wanting more. Weapons that feel unique and powerful"

I spent at least 30 seconds trying to remember how to switch to third-person view (yes, I felt dumb) and then the laser exchange began as we attempted to rescue a plucky little droid called R2-D2.

This is where the problems started. One of the reasons I stopped playing *Battlefront* in the first place was that spawn points were so far from the action that you would spend 20 seconds sprinting towards the fight, and then maybe get a kill or two before you got shot yourself and had to strap your running shoes on again. Playing with a partner helped things, allowing me to spawn next to another player when they weren't in danger (or dead), but because everyone was in the same gameplay loop—spawn, run, shoot, die—every time I tried to spawn on my buddy they were either dead or had just respawned themselves. *Sigh*.

WHAT IS IT?

A sort-of sequel to the original *Battlefront* games, and visually the best videogame representation of the *Star Wars* universe to date.

There were some highlights. At one point, I grabbed a Smart Rocket powerup and fired it down a corridor at a group of troopers, who were being real assholes and kept doing stuff like firing lasers at us and killing my team mates. Who does that? I wrote that very question on the rocket and sent it their way, nabbing four kills in one shot. I felt like a real hero. Except I wasn't, because I couldn't find the goddamn hero token anywhere. *Bigger sigh*.

The Death Star trench run was cool—I was actually the one to take out the Death Star with my torpedoes!—but I came away from my few hours with the same feeling I had when I stopped playing *Battlefront* the first time around. I wanted more. Weapons that feel unique and powerful. Rewards for playing well. Better damn spawn points. I'm hoping *Battlefront II* can provide, because *Battlefront* still shows the potential of the series. For now, I'm going back to *Titanfall 2* for my shooting fix. ■



NOW PLAYING

RETROSPECTIVE RESIDENT EVIL 4

086





More survival and less horror led to one of the greatest action games ever made **RICH STANTON**

PUBLISHER CAPCOM / DEVELOPER CAPCOM / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE

Every game is about repetition. Doesn't matter if it's *Peggle*, *Gears Of War*, or *Forza*, every game teaches the player what they can do, and then builds a structure around it. Great games are at the most basic level fun to control—they make repeating the same actions enjoyable. But beyond even this class there are the big boys. Those that are just that bit extra special, the games you love, the ones with that extra ingredient. *Resident Evil 4* is one of the very best games ever made, and its secret spice is rhythm.

Though Leon's fantastical journey begins to the strains of a Mediterranean song, we're not talking in musical terms. *Resident Evil 4* is now a classic, but it's important to remember it's also the third version of *Resident Evil 4* that Capcom had made. After *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* the publisher was looking to reboot the series for a new generation of console hardware, and gave the task to Shinji Mikami, then Capcom's brightest talent, not least because he designed and directed the original *Resident Evil*. Details of the cancelled versions of *Resident Evil 4* exist, but for the sake of space here it's enough to note that they're very different in atmosphere and action to the game that was eventually delivered.

The final version of *Resident Evil 4* had one big decision at its heart, which was to move the series away from slow-moving enemies and claustrophobic corridor-based environments. This game would be about crowd fights against fast-moving and adaptable enemies, in open environments, and more importantly would showcase a new idea for third-person combat. Out

went aiming in a straight line from an isometric perspective, and in came a close over-the-shoulder third-person camera view, which zoomed in further for precision aiming. This perspective changed everything, and now is simply part of how action games have evolved, to the extent it would be impossible to count how many games have inherited it—and many of the corresponding enemy behaviors (*Gears Of War* is one heir).

New perspectives

This is necessary context because to play *Resident Evil 4* now, almost 15 years after release, does require a little (but only a little) patience. The third-person camera is fixed facing ahead of Leon and, while it can be moved with the right analog

stick, this jerks it around in a manner that isn't particularly useful.

To play effectively you need to 'aim' Leon for where you want to be looking. This isn't the worst thing in the world, but it's a little ironic,

because *Resident Evil 4*'s camera was so influential that,

so many years later, we play it in an era where even a very average third-person game has a better version of its own camera system.

I went back to the game for what must be the 20th time recently, and the camera bothered me for about a minute. The thing is that *Resi 4*'s combat system is so satisfying at a basic level—this is a precision shooter, and uses that to give the player many options. The staple enemy type, the ganado, can be shot in the head and staggered, or shot in the leg and brought to their knees, both of which can be followed up with a thunderous physical strike from Leon.

MIKAMI'S HEAD

Resident Evil 4 was originally developed for Nintendo's Gamecube. Mikami promised fans he'd be beheaded before it appeared on another platform...



ABOVE Meet Ada Wong, who really did not dress appropriately for this situation.



extra

→ Leon's a glass cannon; every enemy hits hard, and they nearly all use melee attacks. But he's got an absolute arsenal of ranged weaponry and, most crucially, can dash into the ruck after a setup shot and execute roundhouse kicks or suplexes. These moves are pure arcade in spirit, not only granting Leon invulnerability for the duration but staggering nearby enemies.

The game keeps throwing different numbers and types of ganado at you, with tougher types increasingly mixed in, and so mastering the combat becomes about learning to control the huge crowds you face. The surest route to death is being swarmed, so you learn to clear escape routes early, and use the roundhouse kick to force a path through groups. Shinji Mikami, however, is not the kind of director that's satisfied with fixed rules.

Vroom vroom!

Resident Evil 4's standout early encounter, and the game's most iconic image, features the chainsaw-wielding Dr Salvador. This enemy type's brilliant because, as well as the overt horror of a guy with a chainsaw running at you, he uses the crowd as cover. The battle takes place in an open village, and Salvador will keep running straight at Leon until he's staggered (which takes a lot of shots) or swipes with the chainsaw—one touch means death. As Leon you end up running a lot, turning around to take aim, and desperately trying to pick out the real threat among the crowd that absorbs your fire. The game shows you the bread-and-butter skillset, barely allows time to get used to it, then subverts it with the unmistakable sound of revving. "The first person to think of killing someone with a chainsaw was a genius," said Shinji Mikami years



"In terms of aesthetics and story this may be strictly B-grade material but the game's elements show masters at work"



later, and *Resi 4* does that legacy proud.

This encounter shows how *Resi 4* makes its own repetition into a strength. The combat system and enemy types are so well-engineered that it frees up the game's structure to be largely a series of set-pieces. Gone is the extensive backtracking of older *Resident Evils* and double-crossing horror plots, in favor of a balls-to-the-wall rescue mission against a who's who of B-list villains. Basic puzzle

sections remain but this is about Leon moving from encounter to encounter and seeing what Capcom's finest designers can dream up next.

As it turns out, more than anyone else has managed before or since. In *Resident Evil 4* you'll fight endless creepy villagers, horrifying man-sized mantis insects, rabid dogs, blinded hulks with super-hearing and four-foot metal claws, cultists swinging maces and charging with shields, and regenerating monsters infested with parasites. There's a giant sea monster you fight from a boat with harpoons, a ten-foot tall Rasputin-alike fought in a tiny shed, a showdown with a load of medieval Knights, something so big it's simply called El Gigante, a reprise of the T-1000 fight against an invulnerable robed goon, several enormous blobmonsters, one gigantic statue, some slaverling scorpion man fought in a cage labyrinth suspended above a deadly drop, a knife fight with

a double-crossing friend, an assault on the bad guy's lair with helicopter support, a final battle where you get to stab him in his giant eye repeatedly, and then an escape on a jetski. Most of these encounters are unique in setup, or solution, or the enemy's capabilities. Leon remains constant; *Resident Evil 4* does anything but.

The last example of this is core to everything, and is also something that we usually hate in games—an AI controlled companion. Ashley, the president's daughter, and the focus of Leon's rescue mission, has to be escorted through significant chunks of the adventure. In another of its subversions of expectations, *Resi 4* sees Leon finding Ashley relatively early in the adventure—at which point their focus switches to escape, and the island starts hunting for them. Having to guard an NPC is nearly always a bad idea; *Resi 4* pulls it off by making Ashley's behavior very predictable. She follows Leon extremely closely, can be told to stay in safe places or hide, and will make a beeline for the player when called for. She doesn't need too much looking after, but gives the player an

EVILER & EVILER

Very few games can measure up to *Resi 4*, and amusingly enough two of the ones I'd choose were also directed by Shinji Mikami. Hey, he rocks.



SO IT'S... RESIDENT? THE EVIL WITHIN
The true sequel to *Resi 4*, directed by Shinji Mikami, reimagines the combat system in even deadlier and more gripping fashion.



ROCKET-BOOSTED RESI VANQUISH
Robots hide as you barrel around with rocket boosters on your legs and blast them to bits. A Mikami masterclass.



MEATY CHUNKS GEARS OF WAR 4
Gears took much from *Resi 4* but went the all-action all-guns-blazing route, and is enormous fun for it.



extra vulnerability. The great touch is in enemies trying to carry her off. Enemies can outright kill Ashley, but more often they'll look to kidnap her and make it to the nearest exit—whereupon Leon can shoot out their legs (or, as I have done, shoot her by mistake for game over). The game is wise enough to 'remove' Ashley at key points throughout and make Leon fly solo again—at least for a while—but the curious thing is you end up missing her. Normally you curse a sidekick like Ashley, but when she comes back you're *glad*.

Original's in

One of the advantages of hindsight is knowing how *Resident Evil 5* and *Resident Evil 6* continued with so much of what *Resi 4* got right, but that they missed Ashley too. The later games would refine upon the combat system and enemy types, but struggle to recreate the rhythm, imagination and sheer verve of this reinvention. It wasn't just that they couldn't think up as many cool monsters and scenarios, though they couldn't, but that the carefully assembled escalation of *Resi 4* just wasn't there. The way that every single step forward shows you something new, and ups the ante just a little more, until you're breathlessly riding a jetski away from an exploding island. Call it pacing if you prefer. *Resident Evil 4* is like *Die Hard*; the perfect expression of an idea, and an expression that the sequels could never quite recapture.



TOP Ashley is the president's daughter—it's Leon's job to get her back to him.

ABOVE This guy will literally whip his coat open to show you his goods. Thank god we mean bullets.

This combination of beautiful fundamentals and seemingly endless variety is what still matters about *Resi 4* today. Any modern player will find the camera annoying for a few minutes, and others will find the inability to strafe a constant frustration. But that's pretty much everything bad there is to say about *Resident Evil 4*.

The truth is that by some measures this is still the best action game ever made; it may not have the gee-whizz bangs and slickness of more recent titles, but developers still struggle

to match both the quality of its workmanship and the quantity of its great ideas. In terms of aesthetics and story this may be strictly B-grade material (though the script is absolutely hilarious, intentionally or not), but the creativity and skill on show in this game's elements shows masters at work. Every AAA action or adventure game since *Resident Evil 4* owes it a debt, because it more or less invented a style that lives to this day. The only caveat is that, while it's had many imitators, none of them really ever get close to *Resi*. ■

WHY I HATE... THE BOSSES IN MGSV



It was a series known for its memorably inventive boss fights, but the latest installment is where everything fell apart... **MARTIN KITTS**

PUBLISHER KONAMI / DEVELOPER KONAMI / FORMAT XBOX ONE / 360 / RELEASE DATE SEPT 2015



RIGHT What a bunch of asses. Not Quiet, she's okay by us.



Done right, boss fights can be emphatic punctuation, dividing and delineating a game's various

chapters, and no game is better known for its bosses than the *Metal Gear* series. The mad rollerskating bomber Fat Man, the ghostly encounter with your fallen foes conjured by The Sorrow, the poignant battle with your beloved mentor in a field of white flowers... *MGS* has had more than its fair share of classic bosses.

Done badly, boss fights can be ruinous difficulty spikes. There's no more demoralizing feeling in gaming than struggling for ages to wear down a boss, only to have him call on some magical healing power.

Unfortunately *Metal Gear Solid V* is riddled with this sort of thing, and it doesn't help that most of the bosses are just different configurations of the same enemy, the Skulls Unit. They're pretty scary the first time around, advancing slowly like relentless, bullet-dodging zombies. Naturally, I ran away when I found I couldn't hit them.

Soon enough they're back, and there's no avoiding the second encounter. At least you get a missile launcher this time, but still I must have died half a dozen times before I finally beat them. Wouldn't want to meet those guys again...

So, on with the rest of the game, which is great until the Skulls show up yet again, this time with better armor. And again, and again. Five times in all, only one of which is really different enough to be considered a truly separate boss.

Even the two bosses that aren't Skulls are substandard. There's the Man on Fire, who roars a lot, sets everything alight, and absorbs bullets. He's horrible to fight, guarded by a weird floating child who you can't hurt at all, and is seemingly there only for aesthetic effect: Look, a creepy floating child version of Psycho Mantis; but, damn, this means a really annoying boss fight.

COVER VERSION

MGS is technically not dead, and will be returning next year in the form of a multiplayer shooter, *MGS Survive*.



I'm not quite sure how I got past that one. I think maybe I managed to get him wet and his fire went out long enough for a chopper to airlift me to safety. Either that or he spent too long chasing me around, and his floating friend had to go. Not knowing for certain how you 'won' is not the mark of a great boss battle, and neither is a feeling of relief that it's all over and you'll never have to play it again.

"Having spent around 85 hours enjoying most of the rest of the game, I gave up at this point"

It wasn't always this way. For example, take *Metal Gear Solid 3*'s rightly famous showdown with sharpshooting centenarian The End, a highlight of the series. If you approach the fight head-on it's a typically grueling affair, as you'll get shot if you stick your head up for more than a few seconds while looking for him. Even *MGS V* can do that.

Bypass operation

But the real brilliance of this encounter, and the main reason it's held in such high regard, is that it has hidden ways of allowing you to bypass the fight. If your sneaking skills are high you can creep up on him while he's asleep. If frustration gets the better of you and you abandon your game for a while, you'll find he has died of old age while waiting for you to pop your head back up. Alternatively, in an

earlier scene you can catch a glimpse of the old chap relaxing unaware in a wheelchair. Whip out a sniper rifle and that's it. The End.

MGS V rehashes this encounter to a certain extent in the fourth meeting with the Skulls, the cyborg bikini sniper squad version, but only the worst parts. It's just a whole lot of crawling around in the mist, belly-wriggling slowly towards a marker on your HUD

ABOVE Skulls Unit vanishing snipers: not as good as *The End*.

BELOW Sahelanthropus: not as good as *Metal Gears* Rex or Ray.

until you can land a single shot on one of them, at which point they all teleport to new locations and you start again.

Then there's the giant robot Sahelanthropus. There's nothing remotely clever about this final boss encounter, it's just you and a limited amount of ammo versus a near-invulnerable, rocket-spewing bullet sponge. Shoot him a bit, run away while he pummels the area with missiles, repeat until you're reduced to ping-pong darts at his metal arse while scouring the barren environment for anything that might chip another precious pixel off his health bar.

It's arduous. It's no fun whatsoever. Having spent around 85 hours enjoying most of the rest of the game, I actually gave up at this point. Returning a couple of weeks later (sadly his batteries hadn't run down while I was away) I eventually managed to take him out, but it's not an experience I'd relish repeating. It's not the way the *Metal Gear* series deserves to go out. ■



091

→ WHAT GAMES DO YOU LOVE? SEND YOUR LUSTY THOUGHTS TO OXM@FUTURENET.COM



extra

SCARIEST ENEMIES ON XBOX



From malevolent supernatural entities to people who've lost every ounce of humanity, Xbox gamers are well served when it comes to monsters to chill the blood... **MATTELIOTT**



10 THE WITCH LEFT 4 DEAD

There's a moment when you first start playing *Left 4 Dead* where you'll see that ominous warning—don't startle The Witch!—and wonder, 'why the hell not?' Curiosity might get the better of you. And, as she slashes you to broken bits, you realize it's not a mistake you make twice. She's the perfect manifestation of *Left 4 Dead*'s dynamism. One moment you're rushing backwards, firing wildly at zombies, unaware of your surroundings; the next, you hear that wailing music and the sound of sobbing, and you're creeping through shadows like a child trying to check for Santa on Christmas Eve. But, y'know, with zombies.



09 CHAINSAW MAN RESI 4

Horror games are at their most effective at the start, before you've become desensitized to how they frighten you. The horrors we remember from most *Resident Evil* games happen early on, such as the dogs in *Resi 1*, or zombie hands reaching through windows in *Resi 2*. And that's why the Chainsaw Man is such a terrifying enemy to face so early. Just when you've got used to fighting shambling ganados, he stumbles up, rewinding his chainsaw, soaking up ammo, killing you with one hit. Like everything in *Resi 4*, it's a fab way of breaking the rules of horror games.



08 NECROMORPHS DEAD SPACE

The introduction to *Dead Space*'s necromorph enemy should be taught in game design schools for how to make a player fear the unknown. From the moment you arrive on the Ishimura, you know something is wrong, but the game makes you wait, hinting at the horrors to come with shadows and blood. And when you finally see them, there's something just human enough about necromorphs to make them properly chilling—especially when you reach the end of the game and realize the truth about the alien Marker. Thankfully, it's good fun slicing them up with Isaac Clarke's impressive array of industrial sci-fi weapons.



07 JASON VOORHEES FRIDAY THE 13TH

It's a weird thing to say about a violent game, but when you're playing with a team of trusted friends, *Friday The 13th* recalls the jittery excitement of hide-and-seek, recalling a time when horror movies still actually scared us. Few games let you play as characters as feeble as the counselors in *Friday The 13th*, and that's what makes Jason so effective. When you're trapped in a cabin, it's not a case of if he'll kill you, but *how*, and the only hope you have is sacrificing one of the other campers to escape. It's almost as scary as the weeks of technical hiccups that stalked the Xbox One release.

093



extra

06

JACK BAKER RESIDENT EVIL 7

It's a testament to how much *Resident Evil* has grown that there can be two entries on this list and they can both be so different. There are more sinister powers at work in Capcom's thoughtful and terrifying reboot, but Jack Baker brilliantly represents those grueling first hours, where every corridor is crawling with concealed threat, and something as simple as going upstairs fills you with childlike terror. He's a relentless, terrifying opponent, at his most effective when he's still in human form; it recalls horrifying images of real-life serial killers and the isolated, unwelcoming parts of the US seen in movies such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Brr.



05

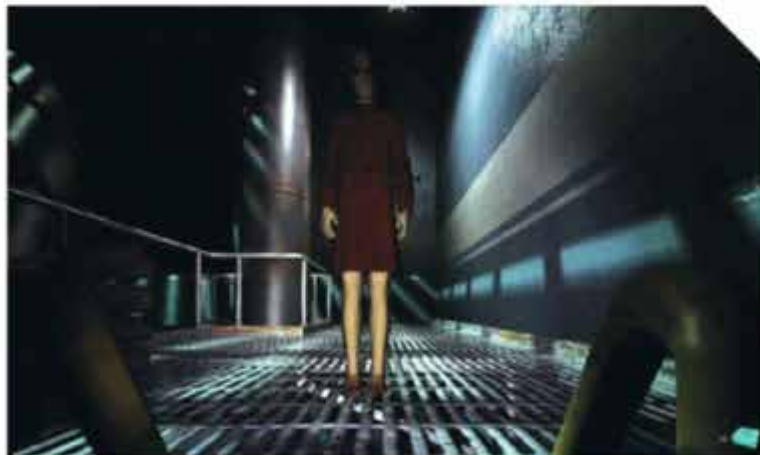
**REBORN LAURA
THE EVIL WITHIN**

Shinji Mikami understands that horror is as much about sound as it is torrents of gore (although you get plenty of the latter in *The Evil Within*, too). That's why all of the enemies in his cerebral survival horror game are as unpleasant to hear as they are to see. The best example of this is Laura—it's not just the sight of her that chills the blood, but the screaming, gushing sound of eruption as she bursts out of the ground in a geyser of unspeakable fluids. It makes a nerve-shredding experience even more intolerable—you'll want to wash your ears after fighting her.

04

ALMA FEAR

Over the course of the *FEAR* games, Alma goes from sinister ghost-girl to full-on, dear-lord-what-did-you-do-to-me malevolent spirit. But she's most effective early on. The glimpses of her you catch in the first *FEAR* game are perfectly done, with the same kind of restraint you'd expect from the East Asian horror films that inform her design. It works because they're specifically designed for games—things like seeing her appear at the top of a ladder a split-second before you descend. As you progress through the game you discover she's got a good reason for being consumed by vengeance, but it doesn't make her any less terrifying.



03

PIGSY MANHUNT

Pigsy is repellant precisely because he has a spark of humanity buried under all the fat, blood, and rotting pig flesh. He's so effective because you know that you'll have to fight him, but Rockstar takes its time revealing him, teasing you with glimpses of cannibalism, snuff films, and complete mental degradation. When you finally meet Pigsy, it's as horrible as you'd expect—a miserable, grueling experience, with no sense of reward or relief.



02

THE XENOMORPH ALIEN: ISOLATION

Few enemies in games are intimidating enough to stalk you over the course of 12 hours without become tired or predictable, but the Xenomorph from *Alien: Isolation* manages it. Perhaps there's something in HR Giger's design that bothers us on an evolutionary level; or perhaps it's because it looks like a big angry dick made of teeth. Whatever the reason, being hunted by an enemy you can't fight is a uniquely terrifying experience. In many ways, the Xenomorph is the perfect fit for ruthless AI—your enemy is as cold, procedural, and unfeeling as the technology that powers it. The detailed setting is a playground for the iconic monster, too. It'd be a treat exploring all these retro sci-fi environments if you weren't being hunted by a living nightmare. But you are! No dawdling.



01

PYRAMID HEAD SILENT HILL 2

There are individual moments in the *Silent Hill* series that are scarier than Pyramid Head himself—the bleeding mirror in *Silent Hill 3* is a good example—but the apron-clad manifestation of James Sunderland's dark side is one of the most powerful, complex and horrific enemies in gaming. It's partly down to how he's introduced. He's cloaked in darkness early on, distinguishable but rarely distinct. You see glimpses of him doing terrible things to the creatures you've been fighting, showing you that however bad they are, he's worse. And when you first fight him, it's on a tight, claustrophobic platform, with little room to manoeuvre and no chance to escape. He's the perfect manifestation of everything frightening about *Silent Hill 2*: Recognizably human with a surreal twist that makes him alien and unnatural, defined by uncomfortable, psychosexual undertones. And finding out the truth about what he is only makes things worse...



095



extra

Games, films and television—everything you need for the ultimate Xbox One experience

THE TEN BEST XBOX ONE GAMES

games

01 THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO

Hearts Of Stone and *Blood And Wine* have made an already outstanding RPG unmissable. One of the most authentic, entertaining game worlds ever.

DEFINING MOMENT Geralt in a bath tub. It changed our lives.



02 GRAND THEFT AUTO V

PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES

Brutal and beautiful in equal measures, *GTA V* is so rich in size, scope, and spectacle it's hard to believe it was originally built for Xbox 360.

DEFINING MOMENT Pulling off a slick powerslide while racing your friends in *GTA Online*.



03 DARK SOULS III

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO

Get over the initial difficulty hump, and you're rewarded with a combat system that gives you unparalleled opportunities to express yourself.

DEFINING MOMENT Beating a boss the size of a family home using nothing but a rusty sword and your epic skills.



04 BATTLEFIELD 1

PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS

Alongside a surprisingly affecting single-player campaign comes one of the most robust and satisfying multiplayer offerings on Xbox One. Brave and unforgettable.

DEFINING MOMENT Jumping into a tank and knocking down an entire building.



05 OVERWATCH

PUBLISHER BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

Blizzard decides to have a go at making a multiplayer shooter, and somehow ends up creating one of the best since *Team Fortress 2*. Just beginner's luck? We doubt it.

DEFINING MOMENT Getting Play Of The Game by wiping the enemy team.



06 TITANFALL 2

PUBLISHER RESPAWN ENTERTAINMENT

This sequel to the ace (but multiplayer-only) game compensates with arguably one of the best solo FPS campaigns ever. It's a wall-running, double-jumping, mech-punching delight.

DEFINING MOMENT Taking out three opponents at once with a Tick.



07 DISHONORED 2

PUBLISHER ARKANE STUDIOS

This supernatural stealth-'em-up is a superb action game and a landmark work of videogame world-building, wrapped up in a sumptuous art style.

DEFINING MOMENT Exploring Karnaca's shifting clockwork mansion and finding your way between the walls.



08 GEARS OF WAR 4

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT STUDIOS

A soft reboot that respects what made *Gears* great, then introduces new threats and surprises for the best game since *GOW 2*. An essential entry for Gear-heads and newcomers alike.

DEFINING MOMENT Fighting Swarm in the storm during the peaks of Act 4.



09 WHAT REMAINS OF EDITH FINCH

PUBLISHER ANAPURNA INTERACTIVE

An unforgettable narrative experience that combines dozens of short vignettes with unique control schemes. Just play it—you won't regret it.

DEFINING MOMENT Lewis' story, focused on dead-end jobs and depression.



10 HITMAN

PUBLISHER IO INTERACTIVE

IO's flashy reboot adds mystery and menace to *Hitman*'s bag of tricks. Each episode takes place in a different city, and each hit is more challenging. Easily the best *Hitman* game yet.

DEFINING MOMENT Executing a perfect kill and walking away dressed as a chef.



→ READ THE FULL XBOX ONE REVIEWS AT GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM

films



THE HANDMAIDEN

FOR FANS OF *Lust, Caution*

Park Chan-wook returns to his Korean roots for this sumptuous adaptation of Sarah Waters' novel *Fingersmith*. When the young and impoverished Sook-hee becomes Lady Hideko's handmaiden, the two women embark on a twisty, poisonous affair.



THE BAD BATCH

FOR FANS OF *Mad Max: Fury Road*

If you loved Ana Lily Amirpour's Spaghetti Western vampire movie, *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night*, her new film is a strange treat. Set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, *The Bad Batch* follows two lovers trying to survive cannibals and starvation.



LADY MACBETH

FOR FANS OF *Wuthering Heights*

Costume dramas are frequently described as genteel, but the sexual and subversive *Lady Macbeth* shreds that reputation to pieces, with a chilling heroine who'll do anything to get what she wants after she's married off to a much older man.



THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS

FOR FANS OF *Fairytales, melodramas*

Set on an Australian island in the 1920s, this gauzy melodrama sees a childless couple find a baby washed up on shore. Fringed in fairytale, the film casts Michael Fassbender in an intimate light.



GERALD'S GAME

FOR FANS OF *Hush, Don't Breathe*

2017 has been the year for Stephen King adaptations. *Gerald's Game* is smaller in scope than *It* (limited to one bedroom), but it's just as frightening. When a man dies during a sex game, his wife has to get out of the handcuffs tying her to the bed.



GAGA: FIVE FOOT TWO

FOR FANS OF *Amy, Madonna: Truth Or Dare*

In 2016, Lady Gaga released her fourth album, *Joanna*, which represented a cry for help following dismal sales. *Five Foot Two* follows the star around as she sheds her image and lets herself be vulnerable, talking about her recent illness and break-up.



television



STAR TREK DISCOVERY

FOR FANS OF *Mass Effect, The Expanse*

If *Star Trek* summons cosy memories, *Discovery* will be like a beam of lens flare to the face. When Michael Burnham, the First Officer on the USS Shenzhou, uncovers the Klingon race, it leads to bloodshed and warfare. This is *Trek* for a new generation.



THE GOOD PLACE

FOR FANS OF *Parks And Recreation*

One of the funniest, quirkiest shows currently on Netflix comes from the writer of *Parks And Recreation*. When the mean, stuck-up Eleanor (Kristen Bell) dies and is sent to Heaven by mistake, she has the hide her true self from the other inhabitants.



PREACHER S2

FOR FANS OF *Constantine, Kick-Ass*

The first season of *Preacher* was the definition of a cheap thrill, with lashings of blood, brains, and the supernatural. The second season cranks this up to 11, reuniting us with Jesse and co as they race across America fleeing the Saint of Killers.



NEO YOKIO

FOR FANS OF *Fullmetal Alchemist*

This whizzing, candy-colored anime from indie musician Ezra Koenig is an unexpected delight. Kaz is a rich kid living in Neo Yokio (a cross between Tokyo and New York), who's trying to get over his ex-girlfriend while slaying demons and performing exorcisms.



ONCE UPON A TIME S7

FOR FANS OF *Vampire Diaries, Disney movies*

The show for grown up Disney fans is back. In previous seasons we've seen Cruella de Vil, Queen Elsa, Sleeping Beauty and more. This time, Henry leaves Storybrooke (yes, the town is actually called that) and meets Cinderella and her evil step-mother.



THE DEFENDERS

FOR FANS OF *Daredevil, Jessica Jones*

A must-watch for Netflix Marvel fans, *The Defenders* sees *Daredevil*, *Jessica Jones*, *Luke Cage*, and *Iron Fist* team up to fight the Hand. A fun look at street-level heroics, it's as grimy as a coffee cup and as damaged as *Jessica's* leather jacket.



OXM TEAM CHOICE

THE BEST GAMES WE'RE PLAYING AND WHY WE LOVE THEM

**Steve's choice**
CUPHEAD

We've been playing this one in co-op in OXM

Towers, and the language has become so bad that we've all had to have meetings with HR this month. It's crazy hard, but so much fun.

**Dani's choice**
SKYRIM

After listening to the soundtrack while working, I

felt compelled to revisit this to eat some grilled leeks and steal some cheese. Maybe I'll go back next week for some steamed mudcrab legs.

**Russell's choice**
MINECRAFT

I made a few tentative steps into this favorite of

Dani's, and built myself a cosy little hut and then a brilliant bridge. Sadly, some undead guy kept coming and killing me, which seemed a bit unfair.



→ FOR MORE FILM AND TV REVIEWS, VISIT GAMESRADAR.COM

the disc slot

They make the games we love, but what do they play for fun? We ask developers to pick their faves from Xbox history. This month: **Barry Feather**



Barry Feather
Executive producer
for *Halo Wars 2* at
343 Industries
Before working
on *Halo Wars 2*,
Barry was the lead
producer on *Forza*
4, 5, & 6. He's a 20-
year veteran of the
gaming industry,
and previously
worked on the *Medal*
Of Honor and *Battle*
For Middle-earth
series at EA.

There have been so many amazing games over the years that it's really hard to pick just a few, but I've managed to whittle it down to five. I found particular enjoyment and inspiration from games like *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* [1], *Fallout 3* [2] and *Fallout 4* [3] because all of the many different play styles that were supported meant you were not locked in. The depth and variety of those games had me putting in 100+ hours into each, just trying to explore and do everything that was possible, while they drew me in with immersive lore and history. Part of the way through you could change the way you played and have just as much fun. Also of particular enjoyment was *Middle-earth: Shadow Of Mordor* [4] from 2014. The mechanic that meant you were actually rewarded with experience if and when you died made you braver—I wasn't afraid to try interesting things and the game did not punish the player for making mistakes. I am really looking forward to the sequel that's coming out this month.

Finally, I would call out the *Diablo* series of games. Every single version of that franchise I have played for way too many hours. In the case of *Diablo 3* [5], I played it through on multiple platforms because it was just so good. Playing different classes and searching for that perfect mix of equipment or matched sets just sucks you in. I return to these games for some 'comfort food' in the slower times of year that occasionally happen in the release cycle.



→ LOVE THIS ISSUE? THE NEXT ONE WILL BE READY FOR YOU ON DECEMBER 12



The premier source for everything video games, TV, films, and more.



www.gamesradar.com



The world's most powerful console.

Games Play Better

With 40% more power than any other console, experience immersive true 4K gaming.

True 4K Gaming

Lose yourself in worlds built for true 4K gaming, where action is brought to life with 2160p frame buffers.

Advanced Multiplayer

Play with the greatest community of gamers on the most advanced multiplayer network.

Built-in 4K Blu-ray*

Whether you're playing, watching or streaming, Xbox One X delivers brilliant graphics with HDR technology.



*4K streaming with select apps, see Xbox.com. Some apps require app provider-specific subscriptions and/or other requirements. Broadband internet required (ISP fees apply). Online multiplayer requires Xbox Live Gold (sold separately). Limited number of games available in 2017 support cross-device play; additional games to follow. Active Xbox Live Gold membership required to play free games.

